

THE RULES OF THE GAME

In an old-fashioned society such as that of Lisbon today, can a modern twentieth-century young man break away from the pattern pre-ordained by his parents? The wealthy Gonçalo is intelligent enough to understand the rebellious inclinations of his student son Pedro, and cynical enough to know exactly how far they can be allowed to run. In the same way he knows just how much independence he can allow to his kept mistress Alexandra and his wife Teresa without his own smooth and passionless life being ruffled. His dingy old acquaintance António may provide pinpricks of annoyance; but Gonçalo's self-confidence seems virtually invulnerable.

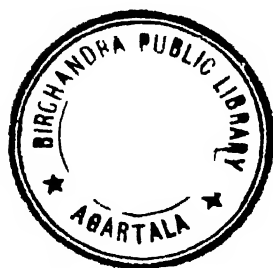
The Rules of the Game is an elegant and witty story about a corner of European culture that has become fossilised. Against this background, the universal problems of class, sexual morality and family loyalty are thrown up in a sharp, unusual light.

THE RULES OF THE GAME

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Gonçalo and António

'My father used to tell me that from the window of the office where he worked, he could see the sea . . .'

'What did your father do, António?'

'What did my father do? He didn't do anything—he was a naval officer. He used to get to the office at 10 and leave at 6 . . . What he did while he was there I don't know—filled in a lot of red tape and dreamt about boats I suppose . . . I don't know . . . perhaps he just looked out of his window at the sea . . . When he arrived home he used to read the paper, do the cross-word and go to bed. He was just a naval officer . . .'

The waiter approached and put a bottle of wine on the table beside three empty ones. António, the son of the naval officer, filled the two glasses, drank and leant on the table again, his head supported on one of his hands. He waited for the hot flush the wine had caused in his stomach to subside, and continued,

'It was my mother, poor soul, who was not an officer in the navy, who was the real fighter of the family!'

His friend smiled.

'Fighter?'

'Yes, fighter. Do you think it's an easy life to be the wife of a sailor with no boats to put to sea? Do you think it is easy to be the wife of a sailor who dreams of Indias and Vasco da Gamas and spends his evenings doing the cross-word puzzles in the newspaper? It's not an easy job, Gonçalo, not at all easy . . .'

He filled his glass again and leant back in his chair.

'And worse still we had a family living in the block who owned a factory over by Amadora. They had a car and everything . . .'

Gonçalo smiled again.

‘And everything?’

‘Of course, everything! Everything that a man who’s a factory owner always has: the respect of his neighbours, a servile porter, credit in the shops, sensible opinions . . . My mother hadn’t any of these but she wasn’t going to let them get the better of her. She battled with the grocer and the hard-ware man, the woman from the little shop round the corner, the chemist and the baker, sin and freemasonry—and I don’t know what else! And do you know what it was, in fact, that she really wanted?’

With two short gestures he filled his glass and drank. He got up, and standing there with his hands in his pockets, he continued,

‘All she wanted was a new carpet for the living room. A red carpet with white flowers on it. Are you laughing, Gonçalo? Then let me tell you that only last year I knew an old woman, over near Caldelas, who dreamed of only one thing: to get together enough money to buy a goat!’

As he stood there with legs astride, looking at his friend, he pulled from his pocket a packet of cigarettes and lit one with his right hand. He inhaled deeply and passed the lighter over to the left.

‘The old gir’ was seventy-seven and had never got enough together to buy a goat . . .’

He pocketed his lighter brusquely.

‘Does it shock you to learn my mother spent years saving up for a carpet? For a red carpet with white flowers on it? Yes, it probably does . . . You’ve never wanted for anything . . . If your mother wanted a red carpet with white flowers, all she had to do was go and buy one . . . Well, do you know my mother went to the shops every day? Every day she used to go. But not to buy, you understand. Just to look at the carpets! Every day just to look at them!’

He sat down at the table again and swallowed with one gulp the glass his friend had refilled. He picked up the bottle—and put it back again.

His friend tried to calm him.

'I can understand how desperate you feel. No son can resign himself to seeing his mother suffer. It's a horrible thing! But tell me: I bet your mother went wild with joy, didn't she, the day she bought the carpet? And you had to wipe your feet every time you went into the living room . . . ?'

'My mother never got her carpet.'

Their eyes met, then slid away. They drank the rest of the bottle in silence and called the waiter to bring another. Only when the waiter had moved away did António continue in a calmer tone,

'Don't look so miserable just because my mother never managed to get her carpet. None of this has got anything to do with you. You belong to a class where everything turns out well. Even the stories you hear when you're young have a happy ending: "They married, had lots of children and lived happily ever after." I belong to a class where everything turns out badly: "they married, and the next day the man called for the second instalment on the bedroom furniture . . ."

'And don't think my mother fought her battles alone, either. She had a whole host of devoted companions: saints and blessed ones and archangels whom she called on for anything and everything. So when it came near the time to pay the gas bill or the electric bill, she began to pray to all the saints in heaven . . . St. John, St. Joseph, St. Anthony, St. Gonçalo . . . Does it make you laugh? You remind me of a doctor I knew: he used to laugh to see his patients taking the medicines he prescribed! I told you not to look so miserable. She was *my* mother, not yours! Anyway, you were nothing to do with that well-off family in the block, and my mother did not blame you or your kind for anything. No, on the contrary, she blamed everything on freemasonry, on the communists and the atheists, on "the enemies of order" . . .'

He filled his glass again and drank. With his eyes following

the pattern of the tablecloth he began to talk quietly as if he were at that moment beside his mother.

'Poor soul! She kept her set ideas right till the end. She died with her hands clasped together praying for the conversion of Russia. Just as well she died when she did and not five minutes later. Five minutes later the man from the Electric Company arrived to cut off the light. . . We'd spent everything at the doctor's and the chemist's. There wasn't a brass farthing in the house!'

'Didn't you have a friend or a relative or anyone to help you?'

'Oh, we had dozens of friends: St. John, St. Joseph, St. Anthony, the blessed João de Brito . . . but none of them was set up in business and none of them had an account in the bank.'

'Your mother's death's embittered you. You've never forgotten it, have you? But damn it all, life didn't stop that day . . .'

'Not for me, no, but it did for my mother.'

'A man can't go on clinging to an incident like that . . . You have to go on!'

'That's right. You have to go on!'

'And don't repeat everything I say! It's a habit that infuriates me!'

'I'm sorry, Goncalo. I didn't do it to annoy you. Anyway it's not worth the trouble, annoying you. You go out of here and on to your club or back home, and in two hours from now you won't remember me or my mother. Not until next month, when we meet again for our dinner. It's your monthly sacrifice.'

'If it were a sacrifice, I shouldn't come.'

'Perhaps. I don't know . . .'

They were silent for a few moments, watching the waiters who stood talking, leaning on the bar at the far end of the room. The naval officer's son leaned forward in his chair and called to his friend:

'Gonçalo!'

His friend indicated by a slight nod of the head that he was ready to listen.

'Could you answer a question of mine sincerely?'

'It depends on the question, but I suppose so.'

'Why the hell do you come and have dinner with me every month and keep up this farce of a friendship? I can't interest you in the least. I was born in the 2,500 escudos a month class and I have already reached my limit. I'm of no importance politically. I have no future. I don't even know the people you know . . . Tell me, why do you come and have dinner with me every month?'

The two friends leaned back in their chairs and finished the rest of the wine. António insisted:

'Go on! Tell me why you keep up this tradition which doesn't interest you in the least . . . go on . . . tell me . . .'

'You answer for me. Why do you think I come?'

'I don't know, and I've thought a lot about it. You and I both know that our worlds are entirely different, and that they don't mix. You and I both know that friendship is only possible within the limits of those worlds. How can I be a friend of someone for whom three whiskies before dinner means simply three whiskies before dinner and not an outrageous extravagance? And you? How can you be a friend of someone whom you have already mentally classified as belonging to the class who'll never get beyond the 2,500 a month limit? We have been having dinner together for more than thirty years, and you never knew till this evening that my father was in the navy . . . Every month we sit here at table and look at each other and don't know what to say . . . We don't know the same people, nor read the same books, nor have the same interests. Even our ties are different. Would you dare meet your friends wearing this tie of mine?'

'No.'

'Does any of your friends wear a tie like mine?'

'Friends, no.'

'Would you dare invite me to have dinner in a restaurant where you knew you would meet any friends of yours?'

'You are asking idiotic questions which are getting us nowhere.'

'No, answer me. Would you?'

'I might meet friends of mine here in this restaurant.'

'Don't lie. You know as well as I do that people in your class don't come to the *Leão d'Ouro*.'

'Why not?'

'For the same reason that you don't buy ties like mine. Do you think I was born yesterday?'

'I haven't the least desire to lie to you, and seeing that you insist, I'll answer your question in a straightforward manner: I'd certainly have dinner with you in a restaurant where I might meet my friends. I have reached a position in life where I can be seen with whom I choose.'

'That answer's most revealing, Gonçalves. Now tell me, why do you keep up these monthly dinners?'

'I have told you to answer yourself.'

'Right then, I'll go on. Do you come here perhaps so that afterwards at home you can feel you have stayed true to your old school friends and that you are one better than most of your class? Or do you think I have some political influence in a field where it suits you to be looked on as a human being, maybe? I'm sick of thinking about it. And yet I can't come to any decision. I am rather inclined, though, to the first suggestion. I think you come here and have dinner with me so that you don't completely lose the respect that you would like to have for yourself. You like to think that in spite of your board meetings and your wealth, you are still the same chap as you were at school. I am the proof of this, the school-friend you continue to see, right through your life. You come and have dinner with me so you can tell yourself that you're a good sort of fellow really. Am I right?'

'No.'

'Then what is it?'

'As you insist on a sincere answer, I'll give it you. Do you really want to know the truth?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Even if it is disagreeable to you?'

'You know now that in the world I live in, mothers never manage to get the red carpets they have set their hearts on. The disagreeable is the least of evils as far as we are concerned . . .'

'Well, then, António, here is the sincere reply you have asked for: you are of no interest to me whatsoever. I come and have dinner with you through habit and nothing else. We began the habit and well, it goes on . . .'

'You've forgotten something.'

'What?'

'That I am perhaps the only person with whom you can be your real self, because I'm the only person who is not interested in your business affairs and who is of no social importance to you. Once a month you come here and are your real self with me. It's as if you were taking a purge.'

The rich friend smiled:

'You are flattering yourself, António, in thinking you have a purgative effect on me. Not even that . . .'

They got up and called the waiter, divided the bill between the two of them and went out. Outside it was raining.

'Till the 15th.'

'Till the 15th.'

António

The naval officer's son crossed Rossio Square and decided to walk up Avenida Almirante Reis.

And who had Admiral Reis been? What had he discovered? Gunpowder? Perhaps he had discovered gunpowder and not told anyone about it. Vasco da Gama, Bartolomeu Dias, Diogo Cão, Fuas Roupinho, yes . . . but I can't seem to remember Reis. Who was Admiral Reis? Perhaps he was one of those who used to watch the sea from the office window . . . Reis, Reis, Reis, Reis . . . the name does not ring a bell . . . All I can remember is Reis from the office . . . Poor Reis . . . Imagine him dressed up like an admiral! Perhaps Reis is not the name of a person, but a myth. A symbol, maybe. But a symbol of what? I'd better learn to stop thinking. How wonderful if I could learn to stop thinking . . . To live like someone seated in the cinema, following the images which are already joined together for you, without your having to make the effort of connecting them . . .

In the Praça do Chile he turned right and when he entered the boarding-house, stamped his feet on the mat to get rid of the water which had accumulated on his shoes and in the bottoms of his trousers. He climbed slowly up to his room.

Why do I go and have dinner every month with Gonçalo? Why? And why do I have to spoil every conversation with my sourness? Why do I insist on talking about my neediness, my lack of money? Is it this sourness, perhaps, which sustains the tradition of our monthly dinners? Does Gonçalo, I wonder, spend hours thinking about the tie he is going to wear, and what we'll talk about, and how to eat crayfish without getting his hands dirty? Of course not. Here I am flattering myself again, as he says. What did I say that about the purge for? As far as he's concerned I'm no more than an old school friend. How many chaps like me has he got in his office, at his beck and call? Thirty or more, at least, all just the same as me, living in boarding-houses like this one, wearing ties just like mine. I could have done without hearing that remark about the purge . . .

He lay down. The rain lashed the window panes. There was nothing interesting in the evening paper.

Always the same thing. The papers are all alike. Two inaugurations in the provinces. Three dinners in honour of three professional men all equally fat and dressed exactly alike. A speech on the historic destiny of the Nation. A speech like the one yesterday and the one the day before yesterday, and the day before that. Be interesting to know what my historic destiny is. Has the fellow gone home, I wonder? Where do those chaps go after supper, who don't have to be in the office at set hours? I don't know much about that sort of people . . . If my historic destiny doesn't hurry up, it will be too late . . . I'm old. Old and fed up. And if I had a woman here in the bed now? Suppose I were married? It would be no different. I'd tell her what happened in the restaurant. I'd tell her everything. No, not quite everything. There are certain things that you cannot tell. A man cannot tell a woman he was humiliated by a friend in a restaurant. These things you can only tell if you can end by saying how you gave the friend a hiding. And what about the men who take the hiding? What do they tell their wives? Nothing. It must be difficult to be married. Every man, sometime or another, takes a hiding which he cannot tell his wife about, and then, every time he looks at her, he remembers the unmentioned blows. Every time he looks at her, he takes another beating. Has the fellow gone home I wonder? Is he cold perhaps, devoid of emotion, incapable of losing his temper?

He let the paper drop to the floor and turned out the bedside lamp.

No one should hate others, but I hate him. Him and all the rest like him. I hate all those who can eat crayfish without getting their hands dirty. I loathe them. And I'd kill them if I could.

Gonçalo

When Gonçalo left the restaurant, he took a taxi. In the Calçada da Estrela, it skidded into the tram-lines and the driver had to swerve sharply to right it. At Rua da Bela Vista, the taxi turned left.

The fellow is like a gunman hidden on a roof-top waiting for the enemy to appear in the street below. He wants to kill him, but he does not want the enemy to know where the shot came from. He is frightened he will not hit a vital organ. He is frightened of reprisals. For ten years now he has been making veiled accusations against me, accusing me in every conversation, in every word, but he has never attacked me openly. He is frightened. He loses his temper when I don't respond to his hints. Whenever I look at him directly, he starts thinking I am criticizing the design of his tie or the cut of his coat. Today it was the crayfish. He got his hands dirty and I smiled. He lost his temper. He decided to accuse me of his mother's death. My office became a factory in Amadora. I became responsible for the frustrated dreams of his mother, and the old woman who was saving to buy a goat. The old woman of Caldelas. I wonder if she ever really existed, or was she merely invented on the spur of the moment in order to make me feel ashamed of having a Bentley at the age of fifty-five, while she, at seventy-seven, was still trying to get together enough to buy a goat? If the fellow only knew how childish his whole behaviour is! And how easy it is to understand what is behind everything he says! The red carpet with the white flowers . . . the electricity cut off five minutes after his mother died . . . that delightful remark: 'my mother did not blame you or your kind for anything. No, on the contrary, she blamed everything on freemasonry, etc. . . .' Poor soul, how stupid

she was, and he too! Does the fool think you can kill elephants with air-guns? Why do I keep up these dinners? This has been going on for . . . let me see . . . for over thirty years! But the fellow was different at the beginning. He still believed he would one day get beyond lodgings and the office and Sunday afternoon football . . . Recently, things have grown worse. There is no longer any hope. This is the bitterness which comes with the end of hope. Can't the fellow see it is impossible to make me respond as he'd like? And that it's much easier for him, than for me, to break the rules of the game? Of course, this is no game for him, but for me it is all that remains of the game, and if he were not a fool he would realize that men play all games alike, and only the weak and those who are aware of their weakness—those who know beforehand that they are going to lose—demand that the rules of the game be kept exactly . . . I bet the fellow would give anything to be able to kill me, but I should even rob him of that pleasure . . . I would only have to show my indifference to death . . .

Gonçalo and Teresa

The taxi stopped in front of the house and Gonçalo opened the door and softly went upstairs. The thick green carpet deadened the sound of his steps till he entered the bedroom. His wife was lying in bed reading a French novel, which she put down on her stomach when she saw her husband.

'You're early tonight.'

'Yes. We left straight after we finished dinner.'

His wife smiled ironically.

'Did you have a good time?'

'No, Teresa, I did not. I never do have a good time with António.'

'Why do you keep up this tiresome ritual?'

'Even if I wanted to explain, I shouldn't be able.'

'It's just childish. There's no explanation at all. For ten years you've been going out of your way once a month for a person who doesn't interest you in the slightest and whom you can't even call a friend. Simply because he used to be at school with you. I must say I can't understand . . .'

'Consider it my substitute for canasta. I must say neither can I understand how you manage to spend whole afternoons stuck to a pack of cards.'

Gonçalo smiled as he stood there in the middle of the room. For ten years now he had had the same conversation with his wife whenever he returned home from the dinners with his friend.

I never knew anything that was not logical. Everything has a meaning, although at times it is concealed. This is what we call the secret of things. What distinguishes the clear-sighted man from the unconscious one is that the first tries to discover the meaning of things, while the second believes things appear of their own accord, and they look for, not the reason, but the rhyme.

'When are you going to stop this?'

'Stop what?'

'These dinners?'

'When I'm dead, or when he is.'

Teresa accepted the fact that I kept a mistress without a murmur. Mistresses, as far as women of my class are concerned, are like coats or cars that one uses and then casts aside when they are old or worn out. They are even rather amusing, as long as they are within their husbands' economic means. They make a subject for conversation between friends.

'Oh, my dear! You should see the little thing my husband has found himself now! She's a scream! She copies me at every turn, naturally . . . She already goes to my hair-

dresser and I've no doubt she'll end up with my dress-maker too!

The 'ladies' get great enjoyment out of watching a woman who does not belong to their set pretending to be one of them . . .

'What did you talk about?'

'Quite a lot.'

'I didn't know it was a secret . . . if you don't want to tell me, don't . . .'

And I won't tell you. That I won't. Women hate men's games, as they hate all the games in which they play no part. They need to be constantly in the limelight as fish need to be in water. That is why they hate war and football and hunting. They realize instinctively that they are men's games, games invented by them, games that men prefer to play by themselves and in which, even if women do take part, they are only a nuisance. If Teresa understood the reasons why I dine every month with this idiot António, she would probably say no more about it, but as she does not know, she suspects it has something to do with a game of mine, a private one, in which I won't let her take part.

'You don't have to tell me . . .'

'Tell you what?'

'Tell me about what went on at dinner . . .'

The women of my class are distinct from others because they consider themselves under an obligation towards their class and not towards their husbands or their parents or children. Integrity, in their vocabulary, means loyalty towards their class and nothing more. Their husbands' type of integrity might even be considered in bad taste. It has only to lead to attitudes which they do not understand, or to

create a situation which might endanger their class. A man need not go to church. They accept the fact that a man does not go to church in the same way as they accept that he smokes cigars. They are masculine habits which experience has shown do not create situations dangerous to their class. . . . A woman, on the other hand, cannot avoid doing so. To miss church means to be excluded from the set. Even if she does not believe in God, a woman of my class is obliged to go to church. It is a question of loyalty. It is necessary to help those who help us. But it is more than that. It has its point of logic like everything else.

‘I have never asked you to tell me . . .’

Having dubious friends is as serious for a man as not going to church is for a woman. It is a betrayal. It is not in the least amusing. One could not say to one’s friends:

‘My husband went to dinner with a friend who lives in a boarding-house in Rua Moraes Soares and who earns 2,500 a month.’

And more than this, dubious friends have, or at least can have, political ideas, which could lead to unpleasant consequences. Certain political ideas can even bring discredit to the family . . . A whole family can be expelled from the set because of the political ideas of one of its members . . .

Gonçalo stood in the middle of the room to take off his coat, and hung it on the back of a chair.

‘Are the children home yet?’

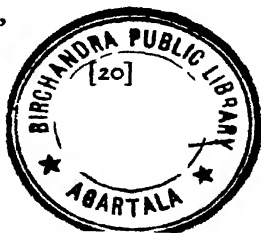
‘No.’

‘What the blazes do they do every night till this hour?’

‘I haven’t the faintest idea. Probably they do the same as you: go round cheap restaurants with cheap friends.’

Gonçalo sat down on a chair and began to take off his shoes.

‘Clara worries me.’



'Why? Because she goes round with young people of her own set? The one you should be worrying about is Pedro. He's the one you should be fretting about . . .'

'Pedro's the future.'

'The future! What do you know about the future?'

'Nothing. I know nothing. Knowing everything is your prerogative.'

His wife picked up her book and went on reading. Gonçalo went into the bathroom. When he returned, the room was in darkness. Teresa had turned out the light and lay facing the wall.

How many times has she done that since we married? Two hundred? Three hundred?

Doing his best not to disturb her, he turned on the bedside lamp, picked up a book and opened it. Only later, much later, did he fall asleep.

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Gonçalo and Alexandra

One can measure the extent of provincialism in a people by its Sundays. Provincialism means small-mindedness, horizons restricted to the ideas of the Prior or the Bishop, judgments based on spite and envy, fear of ridicule and what the neighbours will think. Provincialism means fear and ignorance. It means living as if life were eternal, as if the ideas of Sr. Silva from the general store were decisive and unquestionable. In the city, Sr. Silva is a bank director, since in the cities the banks are the general stores, but the provincialism continues to be the rule wherever the importance given to the Sr. Silvas exceeds the importance that the Sr. Silvas have in reality. In big cities on a Sunday, the streets are deserted, lifeless, reposing in the shade of the trees and houses. Only the parks and the banks of the river

show signs of life, an intense life, full of the promise which comes from love and the voices of young people.

In Lisbon on a Sunday the streets are full of people, crowds of people, who amble purposelessly up and down 'to look at the shops', to eat doughnuts in the cafés, and so the women can wear their Sunday best. But the parks are empty, and only seagulls soar along the river banks.

Gonçalo accompanied his wife to Lapa Church, left her at the door and told her not to expect him for lunch. She lifted her cheek and he kissed her lightly out of habit, and good manners, and waited for her to disappear before driving off up Rua Borges Carneiro towards Calçada da Estrela. At the end of Avenida Don Carlos I, he seemed to hesitate, but then turned left along the edge of the river.

There was no one at all on the embankment.

At this time, along the banks of the Seine or on the grass beside the Thames Embankment, there would be couples walking hand in hand and the sound of the happy voices of teenagers who had saved up for a coffee or a trip on the underground. London and Paris are the proof that life goes on; here in Lisbon it seems to have stopped.

He parked the car in Black Horse Square and lit a cigarette. He could hear the shrill cry of the gulls and over near Rua dos Fanqueiros the clatter of the trams rolling along the time-worn lines. From a boat moored to the quay stepped a large family complete with baskets, wicker bottles of wine and blue bags impressively marked in large white letters: TWA. Father, with newspaper under his arm, led the way. A couple of yards behind followed Mother, bearing a full basket in each hand. Further behind came the children walking in single file in their best Sunday clothes, stepping carefully to avoid splashing their shoes in the puddles.

One day at lunch-time Gonçalo had entered the house of the caretaker of one of his buildings. The family were gathered around the table. The mother and the children

were eating fried potatoes while the father ate the only steak. He could not help commenting:

‘So all the meat’s for you then, João?’

The wife immediately sprang to the defence of the Portuguese home:

‘The meat is for those who work, sir.’

The caretaker had spent the morning in an easy-chair in the entrance-hall, reading the newspaper while his wife swept the stairs, cleaned the house, did the cooking and looked after the children.

‘It seems to me, Matia is the one who does the most work in this house . . .’

The caretaker rose to his feet, and with napkin in hand, made the position quite clear.

‘I’m the husband here, sir.’

It is the husband who makes the decisions, who walks in front and who eats the steak. Above the husband comes the priest, above the priest the bishop, and above the bishop, God. I am somewhere in the middle: I give the priest money, and wink as I kiss the bishop’s hand. It is my game, my part in the game. Rule no. 7 in the games that lead nowhere: ‘no one chooses his part in the game. No one wins his place in the game. Everyone is born in the appropriate place. Food is for him who was born to eat it.’

He watched three people cross Black Horse Square: a fat, middle-aged woman, and a boy and girl. They walked slowly, solemnly, a fitting pace for a couple who are to marry when all the papers are ready and after a decent interval has passed so that the neighbours will not suspect it to be a ‘marriage of convenience’.

Was it Jean or Roger? I cannot remember now. One of them once said to me: ‘Chez vous on ne s’aime pas, on se marie! C’est drôle, ça . . .’ No, Jean, or Roger, it is not *drôle*. Every game is a *drôle* one if one sees it from outside or for the first time. In your country the game is not so

obvious because the players are more numerous and the game more elaborate, but it is just as *drôle*. A husband, my dear Jean, or Roger, is not a man who loves a woman, but a man who maintains a family . . . In the vocabulary of certain countries 'husband' means bread and the rent paid till the end of the month. There is an English proverb, Jean, or Roger, on which I advise you to think awhile: 'You can't have your cake and eat it' or, more simply even, 'You can't have it both ways'. Do you remember the steaks you ate at my house? They weren't bad, were they? So what are you grumbling about?

He started the car, reversed, and turned right into the direction of Avenida 24 de Julho. He stopped at Conde Barão Garage for petrol and while the assistant locked the petrol tank, lit another cigarette.

Half way up Avenida do Infante Santo, he parked the car in front of a tall building built on marble and concrete pillars. He walked quietly up the steps and took the lift. At the top he took a key from his pocket and inserted it in a lock.

No. At my age one does not open the doors of mistresses' houses. It is unwise. I might find her boy-friend in there with her, and then I'd be expected to take up a virile attitude. Virile and useless. What do I care if she has her boy-friend in there with her? It makes not the slightest difference to me, as long as he keeps to sleeping with her and doesn't force me to take notice of the fact . . . and doesn't drink all the whisky.

He rang the bell.

That's better. It gives anyone who is there time to get out through the kitchen . . .

The door was opened by a maid who stood aside to let him in.

He went into the lounge.

Alexandra was stretched out on the sofa talking on the 'phone, but as soon as she saw him, she hastily said her goodbyes and replaced the receiver.

I could have opened the door. The boy-friend is not here. He must be in a 'phone-box somewhere. Poor fellow! My arrival interrupted the conversation. That was a waste of a coin. If I had known, I would have waited another five minutes.

Alexandra got up and came towards him with a cigarette in her mouth. She wore grey slacks with a fine light grey stripe, and a black, heavy, polo-necked jersey.

Jeunesse moderne de Saint-Tropez, in the *Século Ilustrado* version, or *La Femme d'aujourd'hui chez elle* as published in *Eva*. Why do the women's magazines never publish articles suitable for such occasions, as, for example, 'How to receive your lover at home', or 'Practical clothes for days when your lover is going to undress you'?

Alexandra kissed him lightly on the lips.

'You're terribly early. I didn't expect you before half past one. I was just talking to a girl-friend on the 'phone.'

So it was the boy-friend. If it were not she would not be giving me explanations. She did not even have time to give her 'girl-friend' a name. With a name, the lie would be somewhat more convincing, if not a great deal.

'Would you like a whisky?'

'If you like.'

He sat down on the sofa and picked up a book that was lying open on the cushion. He turned it over to see the title and then put it back in its original position.

Les Yeux d'Elsa by Aragon. You have changed your boy-

friend then. The last one was a sports fan. You used to read the *Bola* to learn up the names of football-players, and every Sunday afternoon you went off 'to visit a sick friend'. You poor creature! And now you have to read Aragon. I hope you get something out of it . . .

There were various magazines lying on a low table: *Match*, *Elle*, *Jours de France* and *Reader's Digest* in Brazilian. He leant back and looked round him. On the ivory-coloured walls, reproductions of old engravings. On the tables, objects designed to show that the owner had been around: ash-trays out of bars and fado-houses, lamps made from whisky-bottles, packs of cards and, on a low table, a couple of programmes from the *Folies*.

Thank goodness the wrought-ironwork phase has passed. Making love with a notice 'Welcome is he who comes as a friend' hanging over one's head is too much. There's a limit to everything, after all.

The door opened and Alexandra entered, carrying a tray with a couple of glasses and some bottles, which she put down on a small table. She sat herself cross-legged on the floor and began to mix the drinks.

They learn to sit like that in the glossy magazines . . . They call it 'being at ease . . .'

'Any more soda?'

'No, that's enough.'

He picked up the glass and raised it to his mouth. Alexandra lifted her glass to eye-level:

'Chin-chin!'

I had forgotten she would say 'chin-chin'. I should have remembered that. I must be getting old.

'Where would you like to have lunch, Alexandra?'

Now let's see if I am getting old or not. The players can grow old to the point of no longer being able to play, but they never lose the passion for the game nor forget its rules.

'Suppose we went to the English Bar in Estoril?'

Gonçalo smiled and Alexandra, noticing it, jumped up.

'You don't want to have lunch with me at the English Bar because you took your wife there, I suppose? Well, take her. I've plenty of people to invite me anywhere I want to go . . . Do you consider the English Bar something special, or what? You might like to know I've been to places in France where you've never so much as set foot, do you hear? Why don't you clear off home? Go home to your dear wife! Do you think I need your company for anything?'

I am not so old as all that, but I must admit I am losing elasticity. I should not have smiled. The player who stops in the middle of the game in order to admire himself is on the way to becoming a spectator, and the spectator is, by definition, a man who does not know how to play.

Some days before, Gonçalo had mentioned that he had lunched with his wife in the English Bar. Actually he had not, and had said so merely in order that Alexandra should want to go there at the first opportunity.

Whores are like that. The cheap ones, those who are just making their way in the profession, and who still call themselves Lucinda or Lurdes or Carmo, have a profound respect for the families and legitimate wives of their men-friends. For them, the family is something sacred which is connected with memories of the mothers they have left behind in the poor villages in Beira or Minho, or in Lisbon somewhere—in Alto do Pina or Campo d'Ourique. On the second rung of the professional ladder they adopt the names Odette or Lizette or Arlette. Now they refer to 'the old folk' with scorn, and talk of the family as if it were trash, which deserved its fate. By the third stage they are calling

themselves Celine or Jeaninne or Marguerite and beginning to understand there are certain rules and that one does not speak of families. Neither their own nor their patron's.

'Do you think I didn't know what you were smiling at? Do you really think so? Do you take me for a fool? Well, clear off home then, go on . . .'

Those who reach the fourth stage are quite different. They have been to the sophisticated bars, they have slept with men of the top society, they know the weaknesses concealed beneath those elegantly-tailored trousers, they have seen them drunk. Under the exterior of studied casualness, they harbour a bitter grudge against, an excessive hatred of, every legitimate wife of every man. They never lose a chance of putting themselves on the same level as the wives, of going to the same restaurants, the same hairdressers, the same shops.

'Why don't you answer? Have you lost your tongue? Why don't you say something?'

Whores have only one means of judging their value. As their life depends on the number of admirers they have, this number becomes their scale of values. We have come to the point of Alexandra showing me that she has numerous admirers, that her popularity is as strong as ever.

'You think I live with you because there is nothing else for me to do, don't you? Well, you're wrong! I've only got to pick up the phone and I'd have any number round for me straight away. And you might like to know there are a good many people who criticize me for living with you. Do you hear?'

That's it! She has now shown me that she is still worth a

high price in the whore-market. All we want now is her insinuation that people of my class are no better than her, far worse probably . . . It is the only way whores can revenge themselves on our wives, seeing that they cannot do so directly . . .

‘If I were one of those who go to the Parada, you’d come running to take me to the English Bar . . . Well, let me tell you, that crowd’s far worse than some of those you wouldn’t be seen with . . . Do you hear?’

Careful now. You must not smile. You can do anything except smile. One must keep to the rules till the end. None of this is worth worrying about. Rages wear themselves out. They exhaust themselves. The one who wins is the one who stays apart, who just watches. I must not smile now because a smile, at this moment, would feed the flames for a few moments longer. On top of that the rent is due tomorrow and she has no money to pay. She, of course, knows this just as well as I do, and must make the peace before tonight. How will she go about it? Either one thing or the other: either she makes the peace or I do. I will. I shall save her the humiliation of lowering herself any further. She is beginning to feel humiliated already. She’s far from stupid and deep down, she knows as well as I do the cause of all this temper. And she knows that I know too. That is what really upsets her. That is what really hurts her.

Outside the weather had grown worse. The fine drizzle had given way to a heavy, pounding rain, which beat against the enormous window-panes. Distracted by the rain, he did not notice the silence which had invaded the room. Only some seconds after she had stopped speaking did he hear her crying. Alexandra lay full length on the floor, and with her head between her crossed arms, was weeping. Her whole body was intermittently shaken by sobs.

Right! The play's over. And unfortunately it is no play. She is not aware that this play has already been enacted thousands of times. And it is never a play. And it is always different. Now all we need are the finishing touches, the tidying-up of the room after the show. Now it is time for my part, the moment to show myself worried; to beg her, to entreat her to come to lunch with me at the English Bar. She will say no, of course, and I shall insist. She will come eventually. The play always ends like that.

He drank the rest of the whisky and put the glass back on the table. He got up and lit a cigarette.

Here I go.

He knelt on the floor beside her and stroked her hair. He murmured very quietly:

'Alexandra . . . listen, Alexandra . . .'

Listen to me, Alexandra. Don't think I like doing this. Don't think that I do not feel humiliated to see you humiliated. Don't think that players like to see their adversaries wounded on the field . . . Don't think that players are cold, indifferent to everything which is outside the game . . .

'Alexandra, get up . . . Come along, it is time to go out . . . Let me wipe your eyes . . .'

I should like to call you 'love', Alexandra, but I dare not. You might believe it, and as you are in need of love and of someone to believe in, you might even finish with the boyfriend who has got you reading Aragon . . . and I do not love you, Alexandra, although I should like, at this moment, to call you 'my love' . . . but only because I feel sorry for you . . . and for me . . . and for everything . . .

‘Come on, Alexandra, stop crying now . . . Would you like a whisky?’

I am sorry, Alexandra. I cannot go any further. The player’s only real enemy is the player himself and this is why he must defend himself from himself and his feelings.

Only then did Gonçalo notice the carpet for the first time. It was red with white flowers. He smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

António

António got up late. He always got up late on Sundays. The maid brought him coffee and a roll and butter. Privileges of the lodger of many years standing . . . Twenty years he had lived in that room, summer and winter. He had made an agreement with the owners and had brought the bits and pieces he had inherited from his father: the big chestnut chest-of-drawers, the leather arm-chairs, the picture that used to hang in the sitting-room, of a brig with billowing sails, very nicely framed, and entitled, in gold lettering on the frame: *Crossing the Bar*.

From his bed, in his old striped flannel pyjamas, he looked around him, his glance resting on every object, smiling at the picture which for two generations had played its rôle of decorating the family sitting-rooms.

Outside, the rain fell down and the greyness of the day invaded the room. Even the brig seemed to be crossing the bar amidst a dark, dismal mist. On the breakfast tray the maid had put, as usual, the *Diário de Notícias* and *O Século*. For years he had read only the *Diário de Notícias*. One day, however, he had discovered the *Século de Domingo* with its tit-bits from abroad, photographs of French actresses, and news from Rome . . . He started buying the two to read

in bed, but today he soon put *O Século* aside. What interest was it to him that there were four cars to every five families in America, or if there had been an exhibition of Picasso's paintings opened in Paris, when he knew that he would never have a car nor visit an exhibition of Picasso?

On Sundays he read the headlines of the papers and stayed there, dozing, till eleven o'clock.

This Sunday he did not feel well. For some time now he had put off going to the doctor in the hopes that he would be able to postpone it till he had finished the last payment on his tailor's bill.

How much does a visit to the doctor cost? Going to a clinic must be cheaper . . . I wonder if Gonçalves is healthy? He must be. He spends his summers on the beach and has heating in his house during the winter. What really gets me is the damp. The damp and having to get up early every morning. Gonçalves does not have to get up early. If I earned more . . . How much more should I have to earn to go to the office by taxi? 12½ escudos a day . . . 10 times 12½ is 125 . . . three times 125 is 375 escudos . . . but I mustn't forget to allow for Sundays and holidays . . . I wonder how much Gonçalves earns a month? The fellow inherited a fortune and a position without having to do a hand's turn for it! And he inherited them when he was young too . . . The strangest part of it is he accepted both things as if they were no more than his due, natural and unquestionable . . . As if God had decided that he should be rich and I should be poor! I'm thinking about the chap too much. Huh! As if he's worth it . . . As if thinking about him would help me earn more . . . These dinners don't do me any good. I'm always in a filthy mood by the time we get to the coffee, and he never changes. As if I didn't exist. At times I get the impression he is laughing at me . . . that he's reading my mind, and giving me rope to hang myself. It seems as if he's given me the right to despair and enjoys, in a paternal sort

of way, seeing me make use of this right. I mustn't let myself be carried away by these dinners. The calmer I keep, the more chance I have of annoying him, of breaking down his defence. I must consider what's to be done with this furniture. I can't die and leave it here. And suppose there was a terrible disaster, an earthquake like the one in 1755? How nice to find Gonçalo trapped under a heavy piece of masonry, desperate, and to save his life . . . I should make him suffer a little . . . just for a few minutes, till he realized that his life depended upon a gesture of mine . . . A revolution would be better still . . . I'd volunteer to intercede for him . . . to save his life—on the condition that he became my servant. Once a month I should let him eat with me, to show him that I did not despise him just because he was a servant . . .

'Gonçalo, bring my overcoat.'

'Gonçalo, call the chauffeur.'

It is time for me to get up. Every Sunday I get up at the same time. Habits are the only defence for those in the 2,500 a month class. How much longer is this likely to go on? When is my future going to arrive? The truth of the matter is, I have no future. Life or death is just the same to a 2,500 a month man. Neither the one nor the other disturbs him in the least. I mustn't lose my sense of reality. How many people will go to Gonçalo's funeral, I wonder?

Gonçalo and Alexandra

In thousands of homes all over the world, Sunday night is devoted to the family. That is why whores, all over the world, detest Sundays. They know that Sundays represent the impassable frontiers of a world that men do not even discuss in front of them. Early in the morning, the 'ladies', the legitimate wives of their patrons, go to church and chat with God and about God with an easiness that whores never

feel in front of anyone, let alone God. For them God is a superior being, a cosmopolitan, who hates 'hypocrisy', and in His infinite mercy will pardon them all their sins and will condemn to the flames of Hell all legitimate wives. Sunday nights, for the top girls, are the worst nights of the week. The bars are deserted, the restaurants empty, their men at home.

That is why every Sunday, all over the world, the top girls engage in a hopeless battle to keep their men from dining at home. When they achieve their desire, they obtain a victory. When they do not, they lose yet another battle in the endless war which they know they are condemned to lose. The men who yield, who do not go home for dinner, are, in their opinions, the 'decent types', the 'civilized ones'. Those who do not give in to them are the 'bourgeois', for, all over the world, in the whores' language, 'bourgeois' means every man, rich or poor, who returns home at night.

The car was on its way back to Lisbon. It passed along the main road through Queluz, from Sintra. Alexandra, putting on her shoes, enquired:

'Where are we having dinner?'

At last! For an hour I have been waiting for this question. Rule No. 27 in the games that lead nowhere: 'Act as if nothing were logical, as if everything occurred spontaneously. Never let it be known that you understand the secret logic of things. This is the only way of taking advantage of your knowledge.'

'We are not having dinner anywhere. I am having dinner at home.'

Now the logic of things demands that here you turn sarcastic, ironic. On top of everything else, you have nothing to lose. You have the envelope with the rent money in it. We are almost in Lisbon, so that there is not

even the danger of one of those long silent periods which you dislike so much. So now you can give free rein to your spite. You can take revenge for having had to make the peace before lunch. Begin at the beginning and tell me I am bourgeois and provincial, and then finish up with some gibes at married women and my class in general. How you'd love to be Teresa! And Teresa, if she were in your shoes, would say now just what you are going to say . . .

Alexandra began to laugh out loud, with artificial, brittle laughter, to which she tried in vain to invest with a certain irony.

'Oh, I forgot! It's Sunday! The little boy must go home to receive his good conduct mark! Just imagine the little boy staying away from school now . . . poor little chap . . . and from the nice respectable ladies . . .'

She opened the car-window and brusquely tossed out her cigarette. A sharp gust of wind cut in through the open window and Gonalo instinctively lifted his hand to his coat collar. Alexandra, noticing the gesture, opened the window wider.

'Well, I am going out for dinner. I left school years ago and I don't intend staying home for dinner, while the little boy reads his lesson to teacher . . .'

Ant3nio and Alexandra

Ant3nio came out from the matin3e at the Eden and waited for a few moments in the foyer, out of the rain. Every Sunday he went to the cinema, and every Sunday, when the show was over, he left in a bad mood. He could not help comparing the easy, elegant life, bursting with opportunities, of the people he saw on the screen, with his own empty, monotonous existence, slowly wearing itself out in cheap boarding-houses in an indifferent city.

The action of the film he had just seen had taken place on the outskirts of a city somewhere abroad, where there were little houses separated from each other by green lawns and roads lined with sheltering trees. One of the scenes had been filmed in a shop in the district, spacious, well-lit, with shelves laden with the most varied products. As he watched, he remembered the villages on the outskirts of Lisbon, the cheap taverns of Loures, Caniças, Linda-a-Pastora, with their old-fashioned worm-eaten counters, the sacks of dried bean and chick-pea placed along the walls and one or two miserable dried cod over at the back, leant against the kitchen-door and covered in flies.

Life's certainly a matter of luck! If I had been born in another country, and did there what I do here, I'd have my own car and a heated house. Just because I happened to be born here, on the other hand, I don't have a thing. And Gonçalo, just because . . . ah, there I go thinking of that fellow again . . .

He walked along Rua 1^o de Dezembro and up Rua do Carmo, his eyes on the ground. Every Sunday, after the pictures, he went to Antunes' house, in a little street near the F.N.A.T.* They played draughts till dinner-time.

Sometimes he went along Calçada de S. Francisco, but he preferred to go up Rua do Carmo and along Rua Ivens, so he could see the shops.

By the time he reached the corner by the Kodak shop, it was raining in torrents. His legs were soaked below the knees, where his overcoat ended, and he could feel his trousers clinging to his legs. He turned the corner, crossed the road and sheltered in the doorway of a shop selling plastic ware.

These drenchings are no good to me. Tomorrow I shall

* Fundação Nacional para a Alegria no Trabalho.

pay for this. If I could at least get to a bar and have a *bagaço** . . .

The wind whipped the rain against the houses. He started out again, walking more quickly, keeping close to the wall to avoid the rain pouring down from the roofs. When he was almost at the end of the block, the intensity of the wind increased, and seeing an open door, he dived for shelter again. He was in the small entrance-way of the *Ibéria*. Someone, a boy, took his hat which he had taken off in order to shake out the rain. Before he had time to think what he was doing, he had taken off his overcoat too and entered the bar.

He was no sooner through the door than he realized he was in a different kind of place from those he usually frequented. The tables were set along the walls and not symmetrically placed in the middle of the room, like in the cafés. On the walls hung painted fabric in imitation of Spanish tapestries, and here and there pictures parodying El Greco's completed the Iberian atmosphere of the bar. At the back of the room, near a painted wall, a group of women were talking. When he entered they all glanced round towards the door, but turned away again as soon as they saw it was nobody they knew.

He sat down, ordered a beer, and straightway realized, from the waiter's look, that his order had classified him.

At a table on his right were three people: a tall fair couple and a boy, quite young, well-dressed and wearing a signet ring.

They could not have arrived long before, because the waiter was just bringing their drinks.

They were speaking in French. The impossibility of understanding the conversation infuriated him, and he was seized all at once with a sudden blind hatred of the boy with the ring, whom he had heard speak to the waiter, and whom

* A cheap brandy.

he knew, therefore, was Portuguese. Why should that prig speak French so easily while he had forgotten all he ever learnt in high-school? What right had that idiot to feel at ease in front of foreigners while he suffered merely at the thought that they were looking at him, laughing at his behaviour, his dark-blue serge suit, the poor man's beer?

'I can assure you the conversation is not at all interesting.'
Someone talking to me?

He looked to his left and noticed for the first time a tall woman with long hair who was sitting at an adjacent table and looking at him.

Is it me she is talking to?

'Yes, I was speaking to you. I said your neighbours' conversation is not in the least interesting. Weren't you trying to understand what they were saying?'

'Well, to tell the truth I was, but my French is not . . . is not . . . it's hopeless.'

He was not sure what he ought to do. No strange woman had ever addressed him like this before, without any encouragement on his part. 'There was a time when he had thought of marriage, but apart from that his few amorous adventures had all taken place in the boarding-house, with maids whom solitude had led to his bed. Some of them had spoken of the country they came from and their family from the time they had entered the room till the time they left. Two years before, a cook, in the very moment of the act of love, had asked him to remind her in the morning to buy red pepper for the fish sauce.

'Do you really want to know what they are saying?'

How can I put a stop to this conversation? What does she want?

'No, not particularly. It was just that I hadn't anything else to do . . .'

‘Then move over, and I’ll translate for you.’

The girl got up and came round the table to sit down between him and the French couple. A waiter approached, picked up the glass she had left on the table and put it before her.

‘Listen: we must start talking, or else everyone will see what we are up to. Say something, go on . . .’

António picked up his glass in order to gain time.

What the blazes am I supposed to say? What the devil do you say when a woman you don’t know tells you to talk just for the sake of talking?

‘Are you from these parts, Miss? From Lisbon?’

That was an idiotic question. It might have been all right for the scullery maids at the boarding-house but it won’t do for a type like this . . .

She looked at him in alarm.

‘Am I from here? From Lisbon?’

Then suddenly her expression changed and she smiled.

‘It’s the first time you have been here, isn’t it?’

Is it that clear then? But of course it is. The beer, the dark-blue serge suit, the cotton shirt, the tie. I am in Gonçalo’s world here and they recognize me a mile away.

She did not wait for a reply. She began to translate in a low voice, leaning forwards and smiling from time to time to give the impression they were talking.

‘The Portuguese is saying how he adores Paris, that he goes there every year, that the French food is marvellous and there’s no comparison with what they will eat here. Now the Frenchman’s talking. He says he disagrees, that they have already eaten very well in the *Avis*. Still interested?’

‘Yes.’

How is this going to end? If she stops talking I shall have to start, and then everything’s lost. I’ll finish up paying for her drink, I suppose. Is it whisky? I wonder how much a whisky costs in a bar like this? 50 escudos? More perhaps . . . How much have I got in my wallet?

She went on in a low voice:

‘The Portuguese is asking now why they chose Portugal for their holidays and the Frenchman explains that they came here because they are having their apartment decorated, in Paris, and could not spend much money this summer . . . Now he is saying that he likes Portugal very much because it is so primitive . . . now he wishes he had not used the word and explains that this was not what he meant . . . That Portugal is very picturesque, very quaint, its villages are so clean and white, so picturesque . . . but that he had made a mistake, that it was not a cheap country at all. On the contrary, it’s extremely expensive . . . but it is very picturesque nevertheless, with its little clean white villages, all very picturesque . . . By the way, have you had dinner yet?’

‘No. On Sundays I always have dinner . . .’

She interrupted him curtly.

‘At home? With your wife and children?’

‘No. I am not married. I always have dinner with a friend . . .’

‘Always?’

‘It’s usual.’

‘And do you always do what’s usual? Don’t you ever change your habits? Don’t you ever feel like doing something different? Something original?’

What a queer sort of conversation . . . What the devil does she want?

'It's a question of habit, but at times . . .'

'At times you feel like getting out of the rut, isn't that it? What about today? Is it a day for habits or not?'

She's making fun of me. There's no doubt about it, she's making fun of me. She has seen I am not rich and has decided to amuse herself at my expense.

'You're playing with me, Miss!'

'I'm what? Playing with you?'

'Yes. Just because I can't speak French, don't think I'm a fool . . .'

She leaned towards him and placed a hand on his knee.

'What an idea! Playing with you! Let me assure you I'm not . . .'

'Then what are you laughing at?'

'I'm laughing at the extraordinary expressions you use. It's years since I've heard the expression "play with" used in that way . . . It's years since anyone has turned to me and addressed me as "Miss". You're not a man. You're a dinosaur! Tell me something: are you a dinosaur in bed too, or just a little man who lives in fear of being played with?'

In bed? Impossible . . . I must have heard wrong.

'What did you say? I did not understand . . . What did you say?'

'Never mind. I asked you if you'd like to come and have supper with me, at home. I have a good record-player and you could amuse yourself listening to records while I prepare the meal.'

'But why?'

'Do you want to or not? Answer yes or no and stop asking questions. Why? God knows. Because I feel like having supper with a person whom I've never seen before, whom I don't know, who's a troglodyte and who's afraid of being played with. Do you want to or not?'

'But . . . do you live alone, Miss?'

'No. I've got a cat.'

She's playing with me again. What can I do? I'm going to say no. I don't know her. I don't know who she is.

'All you want is a new experience, like the foreigners who come to Portugal and shave with mineral water for fear of the germs . . . You want to amuse yourself at my expense, have supper with a chap who drinks beer in sophisticated bars . . .'

'For heaven's sake, be quiet! In the first place, nothing you say is true. In the second, and more important, every time you open your mouth, you use the most incredible expressions! All this about "sophisticated bars" sounds like a novel, or a Portuguese film . . . I can just see you tomorrow, in the café, telling your pals how you had supper with a woman you met in a sophisticated bar . . . You'll have a good evening with the 'crowd', the *malta*—that's what you call them, isn't it?—describing me, with an air of the experienced man, a man of the world, a man who has really lived . . . and then the others will go and pass on your experience to their friends, pretending it happened to them. . . . Perhaps there's a writer among your friends? Who knows, perhaps our supper will even appear in a novel?'

António made a move as if to get up.

'Since you find everything about me offensive, from my habits to the words I use, perhaps it would be better if I left . . .'

She laughed.

'It's no good! You're still the little man who lives in fear of being played with. I'll give you one more chance—the last: do you want to come and have supper with me, or not?'

And why not? But who is she? A prostitute? She doesn't

seem the type—at least not the kind I know. Suppose I did have supper with her? I've nothing to lose . . .

'I should be delighted.'

He suddenly felt himself superior to the muddy boots, the dark-blue serge suit, the beer . . .

No, no one's going to make a fool of me. We'll see by the end of the night who's been made the fool of.

All that is asked of a cheap whore is her body and her silence. That is why the cheap whores, those who at first are ashamed of what they are, eventually identify themselves with their bodies. After some—a very few—years, all that remains of them is a body which they sell, which laughs and cries and endures for as long as it can. All this is natural, for them. Life is like that. They last as long as their body lasts. Apart from the body there is nothing except men's money and Our Lady of Fatima, whose image they hang round their neck in the hope that its presence will bring them luck—and rich Alentejanos to their beds. The top girls, those who dress at Dior and sit at the tables at the back of *Bénard's*, those who no longer go to the *Nina* or the *Bico Dourado*, nor enter a bar unaccompanied, do not even consider themselves whores. They live in a no-man's land surrounded by barbed wire and snares and insurmountable obstacles. They never identify themselves with their bodies: on the contrary, they isolate themselves from their body and sell it as if it were something extraneous, something quite impersonal. Their only defence lies in their sending this body to bed with this one or that while they remain apart from the transaction. Many have a personal code of honour: when they send their body to bed with someone they make a desperate effort to feel no sexual pleasure. This way they maintain their private purity. Since they feel no pleasure, they rationalize, they are not corrupt and are as pure as the 'others'.

The no-man's land in which they live, however, abounds in humiliations, abounds in incidents which never let them forget that they are women who sell themselves. They meet in the street a man friend with whom they had dinner the night before. If he is with his wife, he pretends he does not see them. At other times their men get drunk and forget the rules of the game which oblige them to treat their women as if they were not, in fact, what they are . . . Worse still: the man they are going with might introduce them to a friend, and as men laugh at those who treat whores as if they were ladies, the man has to show that he is not being 'taken in', not being 'hoodwinked'. With a word or a gesture or even a smile, he sends them back to no-man's land . . . and the girls revenge themselves in the only way possible: they go to bed with another man. They do not do it out of vice. They do not do it for pleasure. They do it to assure themselves that someone still wants them, and they do it also for vengeance. Then sometimes come the moments of anguish and perception. They drink a glass or two too much and say to the boy with whom they are dancing:

'What am I but a whore? When it comes to the fact, that's all I am . . . I go to bed with whoever pays me most . . .'

It is only possible to say these things to teenagers, because men are not willing to hear them. Men have already passed through the four stages of growth: first they found it amusing to talk to whores, then they stopped finding it amusing to talk to them; then they became concerned with them from the 'humane' point of view (Hemingway fashion), and finally they stopped being concerned from the 'humane' point of view (also Hemingway fashion).

The teenager, still in the first phase and flattered by the confidences which make him feel, for a few moments, a man with a capital M, goes home with his budding vitality leaping, unaware that the confidences were not directed to him, and were not even, in fact, confidences . . .

The taxi stopped in Avenida do Infante Santo. The rain continued. They ran across the pavement, and still in the rain, up the steps to the unsheltered doorway where they took the lift. The warmth and silence which surrounded them and the comfortable atmosphere of the apartment, with its walls hung with pictures, struck them both at the same time, and both at the same time began to speak.

'What a night! It's like another Flood!'

'Well, I must say, Miss, you've got a nice little Noah's Ark, anyway.'

She laughed.

'For heaven's sake don't keep calling me "miss" . . . I feel as though I'm standing at a shop counter buying stockings.'

'Then how do you want me to address you?'

'Any way you like, but not "miss". Look, why don't you go into the lounge and look at a magazine while I get some drinks.'

António entered a large pleasant room with attractive furniture, tastefully arranged. He sat down on the sofa and began to leaf through a *Match*, without paying any attention to it.

Who the devil is this woman? To have a house like this she must have money . . . or someone to give her plenty, which is the same thing . . . I wonder how much she pays in rent for this place? Over two contos,* I bet . . .

At the end of the day and after supper, friends who live near meet in the cafés. The older ones, the really 'pally' ones, stay inside, while the younger set wait for each other at the corner, collecting images of the women passing by for use when they are alone. They make up part of an indefinable group called the *malta* or 'crowd'. There is the crowd from school, the crowd from the Copacabana, the Brasileira crowd, the Lisbon crowd, the Benfica crowd, and

* A conto = 1,000 escudos.

as many others as there are meeting-places or institutions to serve to identify a group in the eyes of its components. *Malta*: Portuguese and provincial version of the French *bandes*, the American 'gangs'.

'The crowd's going to the pictures tonight . . .'

'Have you seen any of the crowd?'

'She's stuck up. The crowd can't stand her.'

'I'll introduce you to the crowd.'

In the course of his life, a man passes from one crowd to another. From the crowd from school he passes to the crowd at college, in the regiment, or at work. From there he goes on to the crowd from the office and then eventually the privileged ones drop out of the crowd altogether and the others fall back to the crowd from the café.

The crowds share certain points of view.

'The crowd liked that film at the Eden.'

'The crowd couldn't stand that book, lad.'

'The crowd knows . . .'

Round the tables in the café, the crowds discuss football, politics, films and other crowds. These reunions in the café, and perhaps a visit to the cinema or a trip to the sea-side in the summer, are the only social activities of the components of the 'crowds', who sometimes in the course of their life have only one big party—their wedding reception. The idea that the 'crowds' have of the other 'crowds' and the life of the other sectors of society is in accordance with their view of the world, a world of cafés and bars which begins in the new part of the town and ends, on Saturday night, in a house in the red-light district.

This vision of the world is based on ideas taken from films and novels written by another 'crowd'. Women of high society, according to this reasoning, are 'shameless bitches' and 'bloody whores in disguise'.

'Yeah, they're as low as they come.'

'Go on, they're not so bad as you make out . . .'

'Oh no? Do you take me for a fool, or what? If I had the

money, I'd have the lot of them laid, you'd see if I didn't.'

The men at the top are also, on principle, stupid, impotent or dissolute, according to the demands of the particular discussion, and there are always stories going around of how their wives, driven at times by despair or by the immoral atmosphere they live in, fling themselves into the arms of the first person who appears. In every 'crowd' there is someone who knows of one of these cases: he had been told by a chap in the 'Chave d'Ouro crowd' who knew a boy from Arroios, whose cousin was chauffeur to one of the 'upper crust'.

'You wouldn't believe what he told me . . . They're scum, that's what they are . . .'

And there they are, for the rest of their lives, equipped with the 'truth', the 'truth according to the crowd' . . .

Is this some crazy female of the upper crust? She could well be . . . with a house like this, drinking whisky in a bar . . .

It was at this moment that António saw Gonçalves's photo, in a green leather frame, on the table. He dropped the *Match* and sat staring in amazement at this photo of the friend with whom he dined on the 15th of every month.

Do you mean to say I'm in his house, then? And she's his daughter? I'm going. I'm going here and now. What a thing to happen! Trust me to get into a scrape like this . . . But why should I go? I'm not a thief. I didn't sneak in through the window. I was invited. I'm here because I was invited. I have as much right to be here as anyone else who was invited. What am I frightened of? Of Gonçalves? Why should I be? What can he do to me? Wait a minute . . . the fellow lives over by the Estrela . . . he doesn't live here . . . so this house can't be his, and she can't be his daughter . . . She might be his . . . can she be? Please God she is . . .

Please God she is . . . If she is, it's Gonçalo who's been made a fool of . . . and I'll see he is, too . . . I can't wait to find out what he'll say when he knows . . . What a night! What a night! What a blessed hour it was when I entered that bar! Please God she is . . . Hail Mary, full of grace . . . Hail Mary, full of grace . . . You should not pray to Our Lady for a woman to be a strumpet . . . but just this once . . . Hail Mary . . .

When she came in with the tray of drinks, he was sitting on the edge of the sofa, smoking a cigarette, and he smiled at her when she entered.

'I was beginning to be afraid you weren't coming back.'

'And would it have made much difference to you?'

'Quite a lot.'

'Don't tell me you've fallen in love with me at first sight . . .'

'No. If you hadn't come back, it would have made a difference, because I'm dying for a drink.'

He took the glass she offered him and drank it.

'It was worth the wait, anyway. Champion. Can I have another?'

'By all means. But tell me something: what happened to you while I was away?'

'What happened? Nothing. Nothing at all. Are you going to give me another drink or not?'

'Something happened to you. When I left you, you were a poor little man, who drank beer and was frightened stiff of being played with, and now you seem another person . . .'

'I'm just the same. By the way, seeing that you don't want me to call you "miss", you'd better tell me what to call you. What's your name?'

'Whatever you like. Choose: Maria, Helena, Margarida, Sofia . . . Choose whichever you prefer.'

'But what's your real name?'

'Not many people know it, but as I feel in an honest

mood, I'll tell you: my real name is Amélia but I use the name Alexandra.'

'Why?'

'Because I like the name Alexandra and I don't like Amélia.'

António got up, looked round him and pointed to a modern picture hanging on the far wall.

'That's nice.'

'It's not bad.'

'I like your house.'

'So do I.'

He wandered round the room, glass in hand, stopping to look at two engravings. Then he came and sat down again and pointed to his friend's photo.

'Your father?'

She burst out laughing, with her head flung back, as if she had just heard an exceptionally good joke.

'My father? What an idea!'

'I don't see what's so funny in that . . .'

'It's your thinking the fellow's my father. Do you imagine the daughters of men like him go to the *Iléria* and invite strange men home for supper?'

'How do I know? It could well be your father . . .'

'No. It's not my father. It's the chap who pays the rent of this house which you say you like . . . and it's the same chap who is going to pay for our supper. I've got a cold chicken in the fridge and I can make an omelette. All right?'

'Fine. Just what I fancy. Can I help you?'

Alexandra looked at him squarely a moment before answering.

'If you like. I'm dying to see what you look like with an apron on . . .'

This time Gonçalo won't laugh, with his usual indifference, when he knows that . . . This time I'll break

through that imperturbability of his . . . What I'd give to see the 15th of next month!

'Are you sure you want to help me?'

'I'm at your service.'

'Don't say that. You behave as if you have been reading the *Manual of Good Manners*, Chapter 5, which deals with "Conversation during a social visit to a lady". Can't you get it into your head that there are certain expressions which are only used now in books: "It is my pleasure", "I am at your service", "I am at your bidding" . . . ?'

'It's the way I was brought up.'

'What's that got to do with it? Can't you grow up?'

'Grow up?'

'Never mind. Forget I said anything. Have another whisky and let's get supper.'

They drank out of the same glass, because the others were on top of the table and Alexandra declared the table was too far away. She led the way into the kitchen. Both tried to open the fridge at the same time and both stopped, with their hands on the handle, and looked at each other. Alexandra was the first to speak.

'I think I have drunk too much.'

'What about me? And I'm not used to . . .'

'What do you feel?'

'I feel irresponsible and I'm sure I'm lighter than I used to be.'

'Is that all you feel?'

'No. I feel other things too, but I don't know how to explain them.'

'Let's have another whisky.'

'I second the motion!'

'There's a bottle in this cupboard and there are glasses on that shelf. You see to the drinks while I beat the eggs.'

'You don't have to say another word . . .'

While Alexandra beat the eggs in a china bowl, António

prepared the drinks. It took him a long time to get the ice-cubes out of the box but he managed it at last and carried the glass to her.

She raised it to eye-level.

'Here's to tonight.'

'Your health.'

'Don't say that. That's not used these days either. Still, what does it matter . . . Say what you like. Your health!'

They drank.

António very carefully placed the glass on the kitchen table before speaking.

'Do you know something, Amélia? This supper is the first adventure I've ever had.'

'You're lucky.'

'Why?'

'Because there is only ever one adventure: the first.'

'And what does one do the rest of the time?'

Alexandra laughed.

'You talk as if adventures were indispensable, and yet you have just admitted that you have lived up till now without one . . .'

'You're right, but today I feel that things are different or that I am different . . . Do you know what I feel like doing? Dancing. And the funniest part of it is I don't even know how to dance . . .'

'Why don't you go and put a record on?'

'I'm afraid the only records I know how to play are the ones in jukeboxes where you put a coin in . . . and even then, only by sight! It's a bit ridiculous for a man of my age to put a coin in a machine to hear some rock and roll . . .'

'There he goes again—the little man frightened of being played with! Go and get a couple more drinks, go on . . .'

While he filled the glasses, António continued,

'One day when I was in a café, I heard a record I liked. I sat at a table waiting for somebody to play it again and . . .'

'Why didn't you put the money in yourself?'

'Because the café was full of people. I'm naturally shy, Amélia. Do you know how many songs I had to hear before someone chose the one I wanted? Do you know? Eleven! I had to hear eleven songs!'

Alexandra took the frying-pan away from the heat and looked at him.

'If you only knew how miserable all this talk is . . .'

'Oh, I know. But what else can I do?'

'Fill up the glasses again. Shall I heat up a packet of soup? It's freezing tonight.'

'Good idea. Tomato soup would be great.'

'I don't know if I have tomato. Let's see . . . No. I've only pea soup with ham. Do you like that?'

'Yes, that's fine.'

'Good. Then let's set the table while the water boils. We'll have supper in there, in the lounge, in front of the fire. Bring the table, and I'll get the knives and forks.'

'I've never had supper like this, with music and a pretty girl, in a private house . . .'

'The "private house" business is a good one.'

'Pardon?'

'Never mind. I didn't say anything. You say things which make me sad.'

'Why?'

'I can't explain. It would take ages, and even then you probably wouldn't understand.'

'If I could fly, at this moment I'd fly . . .'

'You'd crash into the wall.'

'I'm used to doing that.'

'Then fly, in that case.'

'Only if I could take you with me.'

'What an idea!'

They ate the soup in silence. While she divided the omelette between the two plates, António went out to get a corkscrew to open a bottle of white wine. When he returned, Alexandra had already begun to eat.

'The omelette has got rather dry after all this waiting. Sorry.'

'It's excellent, divine . . . It tastes like . . . like . . .'

'Like what?'

'Like stars.'

Alexandra laughed out loud.

'What would they say in the café if they heard you, at your age, saying the omelette you're eating tastes like stars? On top of that, it's not Portuguese. In Portugal nice things taste "like cherries". Shall I tell you something?'

Without waiting for his reply, she stretched out her arm and very lightly touched his head.

'This supper tastes like stars to me too.'

António filled their glasses with wine and put the empty bottle on the floor.

'I'm drunk.'

'And I'm no better.'

'I'm going to make a speech like the speeches in the papers. I'm feeling gay and I want to make a speech like the ones in the papers.'

'Let me present Mr. . . . What's your name?'

'António . . .'

'António'll do. Let me present Mr. António, the most illustrious of all the António's, the most . . . the only António who ever lost his fear of being played with.'

António stood up, glass in hand, walked round the table, and assuming a deliberately pompous tone, began to speak.

'Ladies and gentlemen. I have been called upon to make a short speech in honour of our hostess, and although I am aware how unworthy I am for such a task, I have accepted. I am really drunk . . .'

I'm going to be sorry for this tomorrow. What a disgrace! Another one having a laugh at my expense. A lot I care . . . good for her . . .

'Who would not feel flattered after a meal like this? It is then my duty to thank our hostess, in the name of all present, for the opportunity we have had of entering this lovely house where . . . where . . . where I have just finished supper.'

With an expansive gesture, he took in the whole room and continued.

'At this very moment, while it rains outside and while Europe is being threatened . . . (this is true, I read it in the *Diário de Notícias* . . .) while Europe is being threatened . . .'

Alexandra interrupted him, calling out in a variety of tones to give the impression her words came from different persons:

'Splendid!'

'Good point, that!'

'Brilliant!'

António made a bow, and continued,

'I repeat: at this moment when Europe is being threatened by enemies who are menacing her very structure . . . at this grave moment for . . . for . . . for something or other, it is my duty, in this period of confusion and barb . . . barbarit . . . barbarians, to send out into the world our caravels with the Cross of Christ shining forth from their sails . . .'

'Where are they, our caravels?'

Placing a hand upon his heart, and assuming a deep, solemn tone, he replied:

'Here! Yes, here, in the heart of every one of us!'

Alexandra began to beat upon the table with the handle of her knife, at the same time shouting out in varying tones:

'Well said!'

'True! True!'

'Well spoken!'

'More! Let's hear more!'

António raised his hand for silence.

'Well, gentlemen, there is only one solution for such a crisis in moral values, the ad . . . the adop . . . to adopt the traditional and healthy moral standards.'

'Magnificent!'

'Marvellous!'

'That's it! Give it to them!'

'Give it to them!'

'I therefore propose certain measures to ensure the continuance of these moral standards and worthy customs, like, for example, monthly meetings in this charming house . . .'

Alexandra interrupted him.

'May I speak?'

'Go ahead, Dona Amélia.'

'I feel it is my duty to inform you that there is only one way to ensure the continuance of these moral standards and worthy customs: if, in spite of the laws, people insist on walking along the beaches in shorts . . . we must do away with beaches! If, in spite of the laws, people continue to . . . we must do away with women! And, if they go on like that, we must do away with people altogether!'

'Well said!'

• 'True, true!'

'Come and let me give you a hug!'

Alexandra got up to go round the table and hug António, but tripped over the leg of the chair. He tried to help her, but it was too late: he fell with her. They lay with their faces very close, almost touching.

'Do you know something, António?'

'What?'

'I'm beginning to think you could have been a decent chap.'

'It's too late now.'

'I know. Tell me: what does the night taste like now?'

'Nothing. It doesn't taste like stars any longer.'

'It's always the same.'

‘Always?’

‘Every time you try to pretend that things are not what they really are.’

‘But what else is there if we don’t pretend? Look, I’ve never pretended . . . my job, the boarding-house, my Sundays . . . I have always seen myself as I am: a chap who earns 2,500 a month, and if the boss thinks fit, I might one day retire on 1,800 a month. I’m a chap whom nobody has ever consulted and whom nobody ever will . . . a chap who’s frightened of being made fun of, as you have said . . . and what am I if not made fun of? I have been ever since I was born. Made fun of every time a brat drives by in an expensive car . . . made fun of every time the papers say that everything is going fine . . . Today I pretended, for the first time. Did you realize that? Did you realize I’ve been pretending I am one of the others? One of those who . . . Look: now I have been imagining you belong to me. Just to me, and no one else. I’ve never had anything new, do you know that?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, that’s how things are.’

António put out his right hand to help himself up, but she gripped his arm and held him back.

‘Listen, António: we all pretend certain things. Do you want to pretend I’m yours and no one else’s? Eh? Go on, say yes. If you only knew how much I’d like to have belonged to one person alone . . .’

Before she turned the light out, they stood leaning against the window for a few moments. It was still raining outside and they could see the lights on the other side of the river through the water dripping down the window-panes. Occasionally the darkness was penetrated by the lights of a car passing along Avenida 20 de Julho. Alexandra put out her cigarette in a glass ash-tray.

‘At night-time the city does not seem the same as by day. Have you ever thought what they do when they get home,

those chaps you see in the street wearing Benfica badges in their lapels? Those badges made of little jewels?’

‘I’m one of them.’

‘Are you? And what do you do at night, at home?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘Because it’s so many years now since I have slept with a man for the first time, that I don’t know how one’s supposed to behave, or what to say . . .’

‘Are you joking?’

‘No.’

Their breath had clouded the glass and he wiped it clear with his arm. As he did so he turned to the right and saw Alexandra’s face. There were tears in her eyes.

‘If all this were true, really true, I’d tell you now not to be afraid.’

‘And I’d kiss you and tell you I’d never be afraid of you.’

If things had been different, if it had not been for the family, if they had finished their studies, if it had not been for the stupid idea of marrying so early . . .

. . . ‘There is always an ‘if’ in everyone’s life, but in a whore’s life, as well as the ‘if’, there is always a man too. The ‘if’ varies according to one’s mood, to what one ate for supper, to the person to whom one is telling one’s story, and the reason for telling it. Sometimes the ‘if’ depends on how the conversation started. If the man is talking about his childhood and looks back on it with nostalgia, the whore plays her game in contrast. She was unhappy . . . her parents did not understand her, and she . . . well, if it had not been for her parents, perhaps her life would have been different . . . The man ends by feeling uneasy, regrets his carefree youth. When he pays, he tries to make up for it and gives her an extra 50 escudos, or 100 or 200, as a sort of apology for having been so happy as a child. If the man is young, very young, and talks to her of love—only young men have the courage to talk of love to a whore—she refuses to

believe him: 'Men are all alike. It was through trusting one of them, one who had also talked to her of love, that she had ruined her life . . . No, she could not believe him . . . men are all alike.' When he pays, if he is very young, he gives her an extra 50, 100 or 200 escudos, to prove that he is sincere and that all men are not the same, that he is different from the others. The 'if's' vary according to the aim, or the moment chosen for the confidences, or the latest novel read.

The 'man' however, never varies. He is always the same. Sometimes he is the first one, the one to whom she lost her honour, in the orchard, behind the well, or in some room, rented by the hour, off the Avenida. Sometimes it is another one, anyone, someone sincere and true. As time passes, his goodness and sincerity increase. Eventually he is no more than a myth who has nothing to do with the original. In some cases the man has never existed. He was invented gradually, until he actually existed, until he became a real being. He was born from solitude, from the need for love and companionship. He is an unreal being to whom she can surrender without reservations, whom she uses even, to revenge herself upon the man with whom she goes to bed. She goes to bed with the man-friend but surrenders herself to the other, the pure, true, sincere one . . .

When Alexandra entered the room, it was in darkness. António, already in bed, lay with his eyes on the ceiling and said nothing.

It is now.

When Alexandra got into bed she 'saw' the other one lying there. The other one whom she had not seen for years. The other one whose hair was dark and shining like the sea under a full moon. The other one who had bought her half a dozen carnations out of his first week's wages. She lay down beside him and waited. And she felt his hand

upon her breast. And she clasped his hand. And she kissed the fingers one by one, the fingers of that dark hand which was hers alone. Then the other kissed her gently and she closed her eyes with a great effort. And she saw above her eyes, the other's large open ones. She stroked his hair and his hair was soft in her hand.

Suddenly she cried out. And stretched out her arms and opened her eyes.

Light exploded in the room like a bomb. She stood there, with her dressing-gown pulled across at the front, while he, still lying down, rubbed his eyes and tried to smile.

'Dress yourself and get out.'

'What? Do what?'

'Dress yourself and get out.'

'But Amélia, I . . .'

'My name's not Amélia. My name is Alexandra.'

'If I have offended you . . .'

'You've had what you wanted, haven't you? Now get out. Go home, or back to the boarding-house, or where the hell you came from, but get out.'

'But . . .'

'Clear out, I said, and quick.'

She picked up his trousers which were lying on the floor, with the tips of her fingers, and gave them to him.

'Don't waste time talking. Get out.'

'I . . .'

'I've told you not to talk. The only thing that interests me is that you get out, and quick . . .'

'But why?'

'Why? What do you take me for? A bit of dirt? Clear out! Go on!'

'But I . . . but I . . .'

'But you nothing. I shouldn't even have spoken to you. Why should I speak to people I don't know? That's me all

over! Clear out . . . You've landed first prize but you've spent it, so clear out . . .'

Outside it continued to rain. Antônio walked up Avenida do Infante Santo, huddled close to the houses to avoid the rain. When he crossed Rua Santana, he stepped into a puddle of water. The whole Avenida, in fact the whole world, seemed like a puddle of water to him. He could not get a taxi until he reached the Largo da Estrela. There were no trams at that hour.

I must go and see Antunes tomorrow. I did not go today and did not even let him know. He might think something has happened to me. Habits are the only defence for suckers like me. If I were a dog I'd howl till I burst, till I fell into a puddle of water, out of breath. But I am not a dog and my feet are wet. I must have my shoes soled. Next month maybe . . . Ah! If I were a dog! If only I were a dog!

Gonçalo and Teresa

Gonçalo was knotting his tie when he heard someone at the door. The sound of the bell which reached him was faint, lost along the stairs and carpeted corridors. His wife called to him from the bedroom:

'That must be the car. Are you nearly ready?'

'I'm quite ready.'

He adjusted his tie without looking in the mirror. Weddings and visits and social functions were beginning to annoy him. The bedroom door opened and Teresa appeared, already dressed.

'Can you do my zip up at the back?'

The dress dipped slightly at the front and the back. As he pulled up the zip, Gonçalo noticed how fat his wife's shoulders were, and how the corseted flesh was already

bulging out of the dress. He tried to remember the slim girl he had married, but was no longer able.

'What's the matter? Aren't you talking?'

'I'm tired.'

'You should take vitamin tablets. I'm serious: you should take vitamin tablets. I have noticed that you look tired lately . . . What you need is a holiday.'

'I have a holiday every year.'

'But you don't enjoy them. You carry on exactly the same life as during the winter. You are different from the other men. All the others find time to go to Cascais for a month, with no worries. It is only you who can't leave the office.'

It is not worth answering. One does not answer this sort of thing. They are the normal domestic dialogues between couples of our age and class. They are the substitute of love and life. They break the silence and give the impression that everything is all right. And so it is. The oddest thing is that everything *is* all right. When there is nothing in common between a man and a woman except the bed and the fact that they know the same people, what can they talk about when they reach the age where the bed is becoming the place where one sleeps, and nothing else?

'This year you ought to try to arrange a longer stay in Cascais, for the children's sake. If things go on like this, we are going to have trouble. I'm sick of telling you to have a talk with Pedro. He's getting too old for this sort of thing.'

'What's he done now?'

'What's he done? That's good! We've no time now, it's late. We'll talk about it afterward.'

Gonçalo opened the door and waited for his wife to pass. They walked down the stairs in silence and as they got into the car, Gonçalo commented:

'I trust you don't want to go to the church. That would be going too far.'

'We'll go to the door, as they are leaving. We only want to be seen.'

'I am not going in.'

'No one says you have to.'

In all sport there are the games and the distribution of prizes. The true sportsman is interested only in the game. Whenever he can, he avoids the prize-giving ceremony. The others, those who play not for love of the game but for show, never miss the prize-giving. What interests them is the ceremony and not the game. You can tell them a mile off. For them the game is a simple way to show off in front of the girls, and not the means to assess one's own value. Women of my class are not aware of any game being played and do not even realize what is at stake. They merely want the medals, the silver cups, the prize-giving ceremonies. Twelfth rule in the games that lead nowhere: 'A contractant in marriage has a tacit agreement with his wife: she has the right to choose the social functions to which they shall go together and in exchange, she gives him a certain freedom of movement. If he refuses to accompany her to the selected occasions, she acquires the right to consider herself a martyr, and to complain day and night.'

'What's Pedro done?'

'I'll tell you later.'

'Why can't you tell me now?'

'Because we are not alone.'

Gonçalo looked instinctively towards the chauffeur who waited, expressionless, for the traffic policeman to beckon him on to the Largo do Rato.

Everything has a logic of its own. The attitude of women has a logic which is easy to understand—a logic of which they themselves are not aware. The great majority of women in my class would be unable to earn their own

living if they had to. They know nothing. Absolutely nothing. That is, they know no more than that their position as privileged persons depends only on the existing social order being maintained. They defend themselves desperately, but from what, they are not sure. In order to justify themselves, they have invented 'foreign languages' and 'mothers'. They speak 'languages' and they are 'mothers'. They have deified maternity. To be a mother is a sort of attribute of women in my class. To study, take an active part in social life, to work, is something that 'is not right' for 'a lady'. 'Ladies' do not vote, take no interest in politics, are ignorant of what is going on in the world. 'Ladies' respect the prior, tell the maid what to do for dinner, perform their works of charity and are 'mothers'. Everything has its logic.

The car stopped in front of the Church of S. Mamede. The bride and groom were still in the church, but the guests were coming out when Teresa and Gonalo climbed the steps to the porch. Teresa stayed near the wall talking to two other women, and Gonalo was immediately approached by Afonsinho.

Damn nuisance! You would have to see me straight-away . . .

Afonsinho was the son of a small sugar-trader who had grown rich during the war, and his assets consisted of a venomous tongue and the full details of all the small scandals of a society that tolerated him only for this reason. His social function was that of the postwoman: he went from house to house, dining, playing canasta and spreading the latest news. He had acquired through his sourness and sarcasm the reputation of being a clever man. Apart from this, he was a bachelor and could therefore be invited to a meal at the last moment to take the place of a guest who

had not been able to come. He was tall and bowed and had a shrill voice that was a perfect diagnosis in itself.

'Guess who I saw on Sunday?'

'No idea.'

'Your little girl-friend.'

'Oh yes?'

'In the *Ibéria*.'

'Yes?'

Is the fellow what they say he is, or is he simply impotent?

'She was sitting at a table with an incredible type.'

'Incredible?'

'Most common.'

'Ah . . .'

Sunday . . . that was the day she told me she was dining out . . . What is Afonsinho trying to say?

'She went out with him.'

'So what?'

Has he got anything else to say, or is this all he knows?

'I asked who he was, but no one seemed to know.'

'Thanks.'

'I thought you'd like to know . . .'

That was why you asked all those questions. I know: masculine loyalty . . .

Afonsinho moved away and Gonçalo remained in the church-porch. He took a gold cigarette-case and lighter from his pocket. He lit the cigarette slowly and breathed out the smoke, which immediately disappeared in the cold morning air. Just in front of him a group of men were arguing animatedly. He decided to join them, seeing that

the ceremony was already late. They were discussing the future of the colonies. Gonçalo listened to them without saying anything. They were laughing about the Congo and about the disturbances that had followed its independence. They spoke in terms of the whip and the rifle and 'men with guts', as if Africa were like the low end of town, with not enough police control, but which could easily be 'put in order' with two regiments of Portuguese of the old guard. 'What is really serious,' said the Count of Montemor, 'is that there are no longer any Portuguese of the old guard . . .'

Gonçalo moved away from the group. He was bored with the conversation. Teresa was still over near the wall talking with her friends. He decided to go over to them, as he saw no one else of any interest. They were discussing the bride.

'She's lovely, really lovely, but I must confess I don't like the dress. That full skirt . . .'

'She looks tired, which is only natural, of course.'

Teresa took him by the arm.

'Have you seen the children?'

'No. Are they here?'

'Yes. They came before us. If you see them, tell Clara I want to speak to her. Here come the bride and groom. Ah, look . . . here they come . . .'

The couple came out of the church surrounded by friends and relations. From the background the bride's father made a sign to Gonçalo, who acknowledged him with a wave of the hand.

In the car, on the way to the reception, Teresa talked incessantly of the bride's dress.

Gonçalo and Pedro

As soon as they entered, Gonçalo met one of his oldest and

closest friends, Álvaro Torres, one of the few people whom he knew intimately and with whom he liked to converse.

They sat down, away from the rest of the guests, with a bottle of whisky and a jug of iced water.

'It's good to see you, Gonçalo. It's ages since I've seen you.'

'I've had a lot to do.'

'How are Teresa and the children?'

'Fine.'

'And Alexandra?'

Gonçalo shrugged his shoulders.

'A whore as always. Every inch a whore.'

His friend laughed.

'Get rid of her then.'

'Why?'

'Why do you want to keep her?'

'She amuses me.'

They both raised their glasses to their lips and Gonçalo lit another cigarette.

'What about your family?'

'They are all well. The eldest boy graduates this year. Then off to the forces, and well he needs it.'

'What's he like?'

'A boy of his times: Prévert, snack-bars, Gérard Philippe, free elections . . .'

They both smiled and drank again. Gonçalo made an effort to remember.

'What were we like?'

'Boys of our times: the charleston, love as free as possible, college strikes . . .'

'When did we stop belonging to the times?'

'It was such a gradual process that we did not notice it.'

Gonçalo tossed his cigarette-end into a vase.

'There are never enough ashtrays at weddings. Do you know something, Álvaro? This new generation is different from what we were.'

'Very different. But then the times are different too.'

'I'm not talking about this sort. These are always the same. Their style of dress changes, but underneath . . .'

The two friends looked at the crowd of guests who were clustered round the tables, talking and eating.

'And this is what we defend . . .'

Gonçalo helped himself to more whisky.

'It's not this. If you think about it, you will see that it is not this we defend. This is no more than a by-product, useless but inevitable.'

'At times . . .'

'It's too late for us to change now.'

'What are you defending, Gonçalo?'

'My personal position. Purely and simply, my personal position. As far as I am concerned, all this is not worth a damn. Only one thing interests me: myself.'

'I care about my children too, but I doubt if they'll come into all this . . .'

Teresa suddenly appeared, accompanied by a tall, elegantly-dressed woman, and stopped beside the men, who rose to kiss their hands.

'What hopeless creatures you are! What are you doing here? Discussing politics, I bet. Come along inside with us now, come on . . . men really are hopeless creatures . . .'

Political ideas, whatever their nature, involve evaluations, and for this very reason, the acceptance or rejection of the existing social order. To show one has political ideas is to give the idea that the existing social order is liable to change, susceptible to evaluations. That is why it is looked upon with distrust to have political ideas in my class. Social classes create defence mechanisms of whose source even the members of those classes are ignorant. To ruin a pleasant social occasion one has only to say that there is someone outside in the street who would like to crash the party and break the glasses . . . Rule no. 19 of the games

which lead nowhere: 'Decent people do not have ideas. The only people to have ideas are the politicians (who are paid precisely for this) and a few vulgar intellectuals who do not know how to dress and who write books for the masses, seeing that decent people do not read books written in Portuguese.'

Teresa continued,

'Men really are hopeless creatures! You spend the day shut up at home without seeing a soul, continually occupied with maids and the problems of the children, only to have to put up with these discussions later . . .'

Gonçalo smiled at his friend.

'Women, my dear Álvaro, loathe everything which makes them think that the world might one day change, that they will lose their prestige, their category of "ladies" . . .'

Teresa stopped,

'What did you say? Well, I never . . . It seems incredible . . .'

The tall elegant woman who was with Teresa and who had not spoken until then, decided to enter the conversation.

'It is fashionable at the moment to talk badly of us. It is a fashion just like any other . . . but you might like to know we work harder than you suppose. I, for example, though I never talk about it, devote one day every week to the Conferencia de S. Vicente de Paulo, and I belong to a lot of other organizations where one really works, and in earnest . . . Do you know whom I never see there, Gonçalo? These learned women and so-called ladies whom you admire so much . . .'

Gonçalo smiled.

'I don't admire anyone, Guida, and certainly not learned women and so-called ladies. You're the one I really admire devoting a whole day every week to the Conferencia de S. Vicente de Paulo . . .'

They followed the two women to the dining-room. When they entered, Álvaro gripped Gonçalo's arm.

'This won't last till our children . . . it can't last . . .'

Gonçalo smiled.

'I don't know, Álvaro. I don't know. Perhaps our fathers said the same thing, and it has lasted till now . . .'

At one side of the room, surrounded by the hosts and various ladies who were pushing to get a chance to talk to him, was one of the ex-kings who at present hold court in Cascais. Gonçalo leant against the wall and watched the scene attentively. A tall man, impeccably dressed, perhaps even too well-dressed, managed, after many attempts, to get near the king. He greeted him with an exaggerated bow and remained at his side, speaking in a low voice and glancing around the room from time to time to make sure he was seen.

I should very much like to hear that conversation . . .
What the devil can the fellow be talking about?

The man suddenly looked at Gonçalo and saw him smile. He hastily took his leave of the king and crossed the room.

'What a bore, Gonçalo! I had to put up with that nintompoop. But what else could I do? He called me over . . .'

'So I saw.'

'These fellows think that we haven't anything else better to do . . . just because they are kings . . .'

'Kings?'

There are the big players and the little players. The former are aware of the relative importance of the games in which they are engaged, and the motives which have led them to play. They know that if they face up to life, they are gambling everything and they know just what they will lose—or gain—if they do. They take refuge in the game, but they never confuse it with real life. The game is

their way of avoiding life. The little players, on the other hand, are aware of nothing. Life and the game is all one to them. They play, and they believe they are living. Men of my class are very little players. Worse still: perhaps they do not even know they are playing a game . . . perhaps they take themselves seriously . . .

'I saw Pedro in there, Gonalo. He is very like you.'

'I don't think so.'

The man who was called by the king raised his hand to his face, so as to divide it into two.

'From here upwards he is exactly the same.'

Gonalo smiled.

'The likeness is only on the outside.'

'Characters different?'

'Yes. You can call it that.'

'What is he doing?'

'He graduates this year.'

'Have you got him working for you?'

'No.'

'Put him in the office, Gonalo. Put him in the office straightaway. You shape a youngster in the early years. And *your* children, particularly, who have a future to look forward to . . . Any marriage plans?'

'Who? Me? I'm already married . . .'

They both laughed and the friend returned to the fray.

'No. Jokes aside: is the boy thinking of getting married?'

'I don't know.'

'And Clara?'

'I don't know about her either.'

Álvaro Torres, together with Manuel Chaves, joined the two friends.

'What are you talking about?'

It was Gonalo who answered.

'Nothing special.'

'That's usual, Gonçalo, but there are lots of nothings which serve as subjects for conversations . . .'

'We were talking about my children's future. Jaime asked if they were thinking of getting married, and I . . .'

Álvaro Torres interrupted, laughing out loud:

'Jaime was discussing the future?'

Gonçalo tried to prevent Jaime catching the sarcasm in the question and hurriedly explained:

'My children's future . . . my children's future . . .'

'Ah!'

Manuel Chaves entered the conversation.

'And are they thinking of getting married?'

'No. Not as far as I know.'

'How old are they?'

'Clara is twenty-one and Pedro's twenty-four.' '

'They are at the age to start thinking about it. I have always felt people should marry early. Get them married, Gonçalo, get them married as soon as possible . . .'

Spare me, Manuel, spare me. I have not the patience nor the age to hear one of your lectures on late marriages. Don't forget I went to your wedding and I know your wife's lover. I know how you need to defend the Family and attack the mistakes in upbringing which lead women to . . . I know how your mind works, Manuel: you cannot forgive life because your wife refuses to sleep with you, and you prefer to attribute the fact to her 'moral deformity' . . . It is easier than facing the truth, isn't it, Manuel? Especially when the truth is not very flattering . . .

Manuel Chaves went on,

'Half the foolishness and errors of today are due to lack of moral preparation . . .'

Go on, Manuel. That's the way. Yours is such an old and honoured institution, you know.

Jaime and Manual Chaves stood talking together while Álvaro and Gonçalves moved away.

'Our Gonçalves's an extraordinary fellow . . .'

'He doesn't believe in a thing . . . But then, the fault's not his. It's the fault of a generation which reached its age of discretion during the Republic. They lacked . . . they lacked . . .'

'Family, my dear friend, family and religious education. Perhaps you did not know Gonçalves's grandfather was some unheard of little merchant . . . ?'

Gonçalves and Álvaro were forging their way through the guests.

'I have always felt a special affection for cuckolds. It must be difficult, Gonçalves, to be a cuckold and behave naturally . . .'

'They get used to it.'

'No, you're wrong. They never get used to it. Their horns protrude from head, wallet, throat . . . They never so much as open their mouths without trying to justify themselves . . . and instead of finding arguments to justify themselves, find only arguments to justify the horns . . .'

'And it's always their fault . . .'

Álvaro lit a cigarette and, exhaling the smoke, remarked, 'Cuckolds remind me of little birds . . . their destiny is to be eaten by birds of prey, and yet they do not know . . .'

'You and I, Álvaro, are an immoral pair. If they heard us . . .'

'No one can hear us. Tell me, Gonçalves: would you be capable of forcing your wife to go to bed with you, knowing that she did it only through religious duty?'

'Of course not. You know that.'

'In that case, you have not a cuckold's mentality.'

Gonçalves laughed, and Álvaro added:

'You have a pirate's morality rather . . .'

Gonçalves put his arm round his friend's shoulder.

'We have, Álvaro, *we* have . . .'

At the far end of the room, Pedro was talking with a tall, well-attired youth.

I must pretend I have met him by chance. I am finding my relationship with Pedro getting more difficult every day. I must pretend that I have met him by chance, and that I have no particular desire to talk to him.

'You here, my boy?'

'I hadn't noticed you, father. Do you know António?'

Gonçalo looked at his son's friend and smiled.

'I've reached the age where I'm more likely to know António's father than António . . .'

I can say that here. I am sure to know his father anyway. He looks like the son of someone I know. But I would not have risked saying that to Pedro in another place.

The boy explained,

'I'm the son of Nuno Alpiarça and . . .'

'Oh, I know! Your father is an old friend of mine. I had lunch with him only yesterday . . . and as for your mother . . . I have danced with her many a time. We belong to the same brood.'

They shook hands and then stood in silence looking from one to the other.

Young people don't know how to chat about those trivialities that make up conversation . . . They feel one should speak only when one has something to say. It is one of youth's many points of integrity. This integrity passes with time. This integrity, together with others.

'Are you two here on your own, then? With all those pretty girls in there?'

I am being an idiot. When one reaches my age and wants

to go back to youth, it is difficult to gauge the distance in time. Everything behind us seems alike. I have spoken to these two as if they were sixteen and they are not. They are men, in spite of one of them being my son.

‘Or are you discussing something so serious and important that it has to be discussed in private?’

That’s worse still. If there is one thing that young people will not forgive us for, it is our treating them like youngsters. I have lost my chance and I had better leave them. To carry on in these circumstances would be a waste of time and risking the result of the game before even entering the field.

‘Well, I’ll leave you in peace. I’ll see you later, my boy. Are you having dinner at home?’

‘Yes, father.’

‘Then I’ll see you tonight. Goodbye.’

What was I like at their age? I was a student. I was a student and talked loudly, as if I had outgrown my student days, as if I had studied everything, as if, after three or four meetings in cafés and absorbing a few books, I was in possession of all the science in the Universe. I used to meet my colleagues at night and discuss ways of putting a stop to prostitution, of reforming traditions, of changing the world. This is what being a student means, in small countries. My father was just the same. And my grandfather too. And my son. My son is also the same. It is difficult to talk to young people. They know it all. It was all in their textbooks . . . They know everything except what they still have to learn. And they still have everything to learn.

‘Gonçalo?’

‘Did you want me?’

‘Yes. Listen: the Under-secretary is over there. See if you can look after him for a few moments and introduce him

to one or two people. The chap doesn't know a soul . . . It's a bore, I know, but it has to be done. Don't forget that Bill's coming up for discussion soon . . .'

Rule no. 17 of the games that lead nowhere: 'Personal relations are very important. At times they are decisive. C'est la vie.'

Gonçalo and Teresa

'Have you spoken to Pedro?'

'I haven't had a chance yet. I tried, but it didn't work.'

'Didn't work! Didn't work! Everything always works with you. Have you ever made a bad business deal, or ever been ashamed to say something you had to? It's only with your son that things don't work . . .'

And that is the very reason, Teresa. It is because he is my son.

Teresa

Anyone can invent a fable, like this one, for example, which is about the citizens of Feras and Farsália, two Greek cities discovered solely for the purpose of this story. As the history books don't tell, the city of Feras was a city typical of its time, that is, it evolved along the lines of all evolutions, seeing that all evolutions follow the same pattern . . . Originally the people of Feras were divided into two classes: the Children of Zeus, and the others, the Children-of-their-mothers . . .

After several incidents, which need not be recorded here, nor are they of any interest to the fable, the Children-of-their-mothers also became Children of Zeus.

This happened, I repeat, after various unpleasant incidents which are of no interest to our fable.

In Farsália things happened in a different way. Farsália's Children of Zeus had managed to maintain, for some time, their privileges and their quality of Children of Zeus. Farsália thus became a paradise for the Children of Zeus from Feras, who used to spend a few days there from time to time, to take a rest from the arduous and humiliating effort of being just like other men. This was how the Children of Zeus of Feras spoke to the Children of Zeus of Farsália, about the latter's way of life:

'You don't realize how lucky you are . . . In Feras it is impossible to get a servant . . .'

'How much do the workers earn over there? Surely not . . . ? It's a heaven on earth . . .'

'Have the Children-of-their-mothers educated? What for? It's happiness that counts. And if you think that they are any the happier for knowing how to read . . .'

And the Children of Zeus of Farsália, happy to receive so much praise, and proud of the prestige their country was acquiring abroad, followed to the letter the advice of their deposed colleagues from Feras. Naturally one day the Children-of-their-mothers of Farsália discovered the true nature of Zeus . . . but this is part of another story—a story which has nothing to do with our fable . . .

It was past one o'clock when Teresa was ready, and went down the stairs.

The Bentley was waiting for her, and a few minutes later she walked up the stairs of the Embassy. At the top the Ambassadors received her with open arms.

'Ma chère Thérèse . . .'

'I hope it is not too late . . . I must confess I am rather unpunctual, Simone . . .'

'But not at all . . . You are exactly on time.'

Inside, the Ambassador offered her an aperitif.

'Madeira? Sherry? Whisky?'

'Sherry, Paul, if you have it . . .'

'If I had not, I should send out for some! How is your charming husband? It is a long time since I saw him . . . let's see . . . not since the Stuarts' cocktail party . . . over two months ago.'

'Gonçalo always has so much to do, Paul.'

'Yes, I know, but it's a pity I can't see him more often. He's one of the few people whom I really like. We speak the same language . . . Let me introduce you to the Countess of Ortoff. She's a Swedish lady married to a diplomat who has just been sent to Lisbon. She seems very pleasant . . .'

'Have you been here long, Countess?'

'I arrived three days ago.'

'Then I shall not ask you yet if you like Portugal. We Portuguese always ask everyone this question.'

'You can ask by all means. I absolutely adore your country.'

'It did not take you long to fall in love with it . . .'

'That wasn't necessary. One only needs to drive through Portugal in a car to become devoted to your land. There's no race on earth so modest and considerate as the Portuguese. And I won't mention the villages . . . so white and clean . . . In my country the factory chimneys make everything dirty . . .'

'I am most flattered by your opinion.'

'And Lisbon? Do you realize what it is like to want a maid and have ten apply? Do you realize what it means to want a gardener and be able to choose from about six? You people don't know your good fortune . . . If you lived in my country for a few months you'd soon see . . .'

At dinner that night at home, Teresa steered the conversation round so that she could relate what she had heard.

'Just imagine, Gonçalo, a Swedish lady was telling me

today at lunch in the Embassy, that she had never seen a country like ours.'

'What did she say?'

'She said that the Portuguese are the most charming and hospitable people in all Europe, and that life in Portugal is simply marvellous . . .'

Teresa stopped and looked at Pedro, who went on eating without lifting his eyes from the plate.

'She said that our villages are incomparably better and cleaner than the Swedish ones . . . and that life in Portugal is infinitely more agreeable than in Sweden.'

Why doesn't he say anything? Why won't he bite? Is he listening?

'She said if we lived a few months in Sweden, we should never again want to leave Portugal . . .'

Is he deaf? Or is he trying to annoy me?

'She said that life in Sweden is simply awful . . .'

He is pretending not to hear me.

'It surprised me no end. I had always heard that Sweden was one of those paradises everyone talks about these days . . . It seems it is not, after all . . . at least the Swedes don't find it so . . .'

I give up. It is not worth it.

Gonçalo and Teresa

'When are you going to speak with Pedro, Gonçalo?'

'I'm waiting for an opportunity.'

'If you wait much longer, you might as well save yourself the trouble.'

Gonçalo blew out a stream of smoke before replying.

'I must speak to him, but I must make it appear casual.'

'I'm frightened.'

'So am I.'

António

António left the office at 6 p.m. as always. He had decided to go to the doctor and had made an appointment by telephone from the office to save himself a few coppers, but now, at the door of the consulting room, he hesitated.

It will cost me at least 100 escudos. 100 escudos mean a lot to me. I'll last another month. I don't seem to have got any worse. The worst of it is I've made an appointment. But it doesn't matter. Next time I shall go to a different doctor. What on earth can I do now? Go to the pictures? No. If I start going to the pictures during the week, it will stop being something to look forward to on a Sunday. And it would be a waste of money. Suppose I'm ill? Better not think of that . . . that's all I need now . . . Why the blazes are types like me born? What is there in life for us? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. People like me had better not be born . . .

In the Restauradores he stopped in front of a tobacconist's and looked at the covers of the magazines hanging there.

These magazine chaps must be rich. There are always expensive cars and expensive women and expensive houses on the covers. Life's made for them. And for me? Is there anything made for me?

He began to walk slowly up the Avenue. In front of the

Tivoli, he met Santos from the Accounts Department. They had known each other for ten years and had never met in the street before. They greeted each other and then stood still, overcome with awkwardness at meeting in surroundings different from usual.

'Going to have a coffee?'

'Yes, let's have one.'

'Where?'

'I don't know . . . somewhere near . . . the *Smarta* perhaps?'

'Good idea.'

They started off again, walking slowly. Santos opened his *Diário de Lisboa*.

'Interested in football?'

'I used to be.'

'And now?'

'I haven't got much interest in it now.'

Santos closed the paper again, folded it up and put it in his pocket.

'It's to read in the coach.'

'Do you live far?'

'In Caneças.'

'Where do you pick up the coach?'

'In the Rua da Palma or in the Saldanha. It depends. Sometimes in one place and sometimes in another. Today I was going to catch it in the Rua da Palma . . . but . . .'

He stopped and looked at his friend carefully before continuing.

'The fact is, I saw a smashing little bit, and decided to follow her. She was a real peach.'

'What happened?'

'I got fed up. She was a prostitute, you could tell . . .'

'What does that matter?'

'They're no good. Prostitutes are no good.'

'Why not?'

Santos turned and searched his friend's face again.

'Why not? I don't know . . . Because they're just not.'

They went on their way, in silence now. In front of the Hotel do Imperio, Santos inquired,

'Are you interested in politics?'

'No.'

'Nor am I. And I can't stand these bloody politicians either. They're a rotten lot. Abroad it's different. Churchill, for example . . . that's another story. Do you know who's mad on politics? Carvalho. He never thinks of anything else. But not me. I couldn't care less . . . They're a rotten lot. They're all the same.'

They entered the *Smarta*, sat down and ordered two coffees. Santos took out his paper again and opened it on the table.

'Loren's a smasher, isn't she? Better than Bardot, I reckon, don't you?'

'Mmm . . . maybe . . .'

'Do you do the crosswords?'

'Sometimes.'

'So do I. You have to do something.'

They drank their coffees slowly. Santos took out a five-escudo piece.

'I'll pay.'

'No you won't. We'll pay our own.'

'As you please. I'll agree seeing it's the end of the month.'

'Are we at the end of the month again?'

'Tomorrow's the last day. Buck up, man, it's pay-day . . .'

Buck up, man. It's pay-day, the day we receive our wages and pay our lodging and the instalment at the tailor's and buy aspirins. I must buy another packet of aspirins. They relieve the pain.

'Well, cheerio . . .'

'Cheerio, Santos. See you tomorrow.'

'See you tomorrow.'

Only another fortnight till I can do Gonçalo in the eye.
Buck up, António my lad . . . Only another fortnight.

Pedro

Every man realizes that the world he lives in is not the best of worlds. Every man knows that this world is destined to undergo a change. Every man accepts the idea that one day, because of the very nature of things, there is going to be a revolution.

'One day . . .'

'When all this is different . . .'

The word 'revolution' is rarely pronounced, as rarely as the name of a woman one loves is pronounced, in front of strangers, in a café.

'Sooner or later . . .'

'One day . . .'

'They'll pay for everything . . .'

With the revolution will come justice, and every man has his own personal idea of justice:

—The writer who cannot manage to sell a single book will reach four editions . . .

—The hump-back will live in a world where no one will rub in his deformity . . .

—The poor cuckold whose wife ran off with a rich man will see the fellow hanged from a lamp-post and will take possession of his car . . .

—The painter, whose work receives bad notices from the critics, will see these critics replaced by others, more 'enlightened' ones, who will compare him with Picasso . . .

—The poet will finally hear his sonnets recited on the radio . . .

—The merit, up till now ignored, of José, the caretaker of a block of flats in Avenida de Roma, will become known,

and the occupants, who have never given him so much as a 'Good morning!' will raise their hats to him . . .

—Whores will be considered as virtuous as other women and no one will look askance at them . . .

Naturally no one must say any of this. Revolution means hope and no one has the right to sully hope. To admit José has no merit whatsoever, is reactionary—it is doubting the possibility of a caretaker's having any merit. This is how they speak of realism, the poor young poets of hope, who consider themselves progressive because they have a reproduction of *Guernica* hanging over their beds.

But apart from all these, there are the others. Those who personify the hope of Man, and not the secret desires of whores and impotent men and cuckolds and poets. Those who have the courage which leads to actual revolutions. Those who do not confuse revolutions with revolts in free verse. The useful ones.

'One day . . .'

'Sooner or later . . .'

It had begun to rain again. The two friends, already impatient, started talking once more. The taller of the two, with a carefully trimmed moustache, got up and straightened a coloured postcard someone had stuck on the wall with transparent tape. The postcard fell to the ground and he picked it up and read the words out loud, automatically:

' "Woman: lift up your head and face the future." Damn nuisance . . . Is the man coming or isn't he?'

The other man went on with his writing, and answered without taking his eyes from the paper,

'He'll come . . . you'll see. What time is it?'

'It's past three.'

'He's not due till 3.30.'

'I don't trust the chap . . . I never have done . . . He's the sort to turn up in a Rolls.'

'Bentley.'

'Same thing. Bentley or Rolls, what's the difference?'

'You have an M.G.'

'That's got nothing to do with it! I'm sick of telling you I don't trust the chap. If anything happens to us, nothing'll happen to him, you can bet—the counts and countesses will soon see to things . . . A bit of influence here, a bit there, a couple of days later he'll be driving round Estoril in his Rolls again.'

'Bentley.'

'That's right—you keep on. What's the difference anyway?'

Pedro stood in the Restauradores sheltering from the drizzle as he waited for the bus.

There must be some twenty or thirty people here. And I can separate the privileged from the others just by looking at them. Is it because of their dress? Or is their whole attitude different? Even their way of looking is distinctive. They read the paper and look at the buildings and the buses that pass by . . . the only thing they don't look at is the people around them. The world belongs to them. The others are completely different! That one over there, for example, wouldn't fool anyone. He is reading the paper with one eye, while he is having a sly look at us with the other. He is frightened someone is going to steal his place in the queue . . . The world certainly does not belong to him. He gives the impression that everyone is determined to steal his place in all the queues of life . . . He feels obliged to assert himself, to show that he is as good as the others . . .

The bus approached and Pedro managed to get a seat next to the driver.

I should have changed my suit. This one I am wearing cost less than Rodrigo's, but it still says plenty. Poor

Rodrigo! What he'd give to have an expensive car and be able to drive around with a couple of elegant girls . . . What an odd position I am in! I am a traitor to some and a bourgeois to others . . . I have never even learnt to take all that 'hope' jargon seriously. I can never hear that 'lift up your head and face the future' business, without wanting to laugh . . . 'Young man: the future is in your hands' . . . 'students of today, the men of tomorrow'.

The slogans for hope are as childish as the others, the 'All for the Nation, nothing against it', and 'While there is still one Portuguese' . . .

How much longer before we grow up?

'Tickets . . .'

'15 tostões, please.'

'Haven't you got any change?'

'I've only got a note . . .'

'Everyone's only got notes these days . . . and I'm the one who's got to find change for everybody . . .'

I must be careful. I mustn't laugh when I am with them. The Rodrigos of the world haven't found a sense of humour yet. Whenever I laugh, Rodrigo thinks I'm laughing at the revolution, at the future, at the bound and gagged students . . . I must be careful . . .

Rodrigo stood watching the passing cars from the window, stroking his moustache from time to time.

'He won't come now . . . I bet you he won't . . .'

'He'll come.'

'Have you spoken to him about our decision?'

'No. That's what he's coming here for.'

'And the other chap?'

'What other chap?'

'The bricklayer?'

'He's coming at four.'

'If he comes . . .'

'He'll come for sure.'

'You're sure of everything.'

'I'm only sure of what . . .'

'Of everything. For you there're never any problems. I should have left my car in another road. It's too well-known . . .'

'It's not so well-known as you think.'

'What do you know about it? What do you take me for? Everyone knows who I am . . .'

'And who are you?'

'Oh, go and pester someone else! The fellow's not coming . . . I bet you a hundred *paus** he doesn't come . . .'

'I keep telling you he will.'

'Do you want to bet on it?'

'Sure I want to.'

'I know what you want all right, but you're not getting that . . . The fellow won't come . . .'

Pedro sat in the bus, idly looking at the advertisements.

They don't trust me completely because my father is rich and there is the inflexible rule: anyone who earns more than four contos a month is a fascist. Every class has its particular terms, its particular ways of destroying the enemy. If I laugh at some childish behaviour from Rodrigo, or if I glance twice at Manuel's girl-friend, then I am a fascist. If, at home, I ask how much the gardener earns, then I am a communist. They are terms which belong to the dialects of the different classes, and each class has its unmistakable dialect. If I belch at the table, they would call me common at home, but in Rodrigo's home I should be called badly-educated. At home, people either are, or are not. Commonness is an inherent attribute of a person, who cannot be changed. In Rodrigo's house, they consider

* Slang for escudos.

people respond to education, and what a person is depends on his education. That is why they say 'badly-educated' instead of 'common'.

Rodrigo lit a cigarette and stamped out the match.

'You can't trust these fellows . . . moneybags . . . as if they're interested in what happens to other people . . .'

'What else had you got to do today?'

'That's not the point. The point is, the chap's not coming.'

'What's the time?'

'It's past half-past three.'

'Is that the right time?'

'Half-past three.'

The bus stopped in front of a small café opposite Manuel's house. Pedro crossed the road and saw Rodrigo, inside the window, watching the people getting off the bus.

What is going to happen? What is the reason for this meeting? Careful now! I must not laugh. Rodrigo is watching me closely.

'At last!'

'Why "at last"? What's the time?'

'We've been waiting for you since a quarter to three . . .'

'But I wasn't told to be here until half-past three.'

'Let's get on with things anyway. This isn't a cocktail party.'

What idea have you of a cocktail party, Rodrigo? What idea have you about my life at all? One cocktail party after another apparently . . . The only thing is you have no exact idea of just what a cocktail party is . . .

Manuel got up and shook Pedro's hand.

'Sit down, Pedro. We want to talk to you and introduce you to somebody.'

Rodrigo interrupted:

'Whether we introduce him or not's still to be seen.'

Manuel sat down again and explained,

'It has been decided to bring a labourer into the group. We think it is the right decision and you will agree . . .'

'I've no objections.'

Rodrigo stood, with his hands in his pockets, and observed Pedro.

'A real labourer, plain and simple . . . Do you hear? One of those who can hardly read, and has never been to cultural sessions for workers . . . He evens smells of sweat . . . what do you say?'

Oh Rodrigo, don't be so naïve. Don't forget that I come from a class which has always known how to get along with the workers . . . don't forget that we are wastrels, good-time boys, used to 'slumming it' among the workers, as you say . . . and we are used to addressing them by the familiar 'tu'. The herdsmen, Rodrigo, who work in the country, looking after the bulls, eventually grow so familiar with them that they lose their fear of them . . . it is your kind, the Rodrigos, who still make mixing with labourers a luxury, and who still feel sufficiently close to them to experience a vague yet exciting feeling of danger. You ought to know, by now, Rodrigo, that it is more difficult for me to get on with you than with all the labourers in the world. The reason for all this is none too flattering for the class which, in your eyes, I represent, but this does not alter the facts, Rodrigo . . .

'Have you any objections, Pedro?'

'No.'

'The chap should be arriving. He's a bricklayer. Don't start giving yourself airs in front of him . . .'

Poor Rodrigo! You still don't understand a thing. I can

look at my class and at the motives which govern my actions full in the face, objectively. You are not capable of looking honestly at what goes on inside you. You are a petty coward. Petty and insignificant. If you had been the son of my mother and my father, you would have been one of the cheap aristocrats at *Bénard's*. You would frequent fado-houses and bull-fights, and boast of your nightly exploits. You would refer to the common people as 'rabble' and call anyone an imbecile who thought along the same lines as you and I . . . The fact that you are not the son of my mother and father has not affected your character in the slightest. You are a petty fascist, disguised by a birth-certificate which you cannot forgive. You are a dangerous type, Rodrigo, because it is not good enough to reach the right conclusions by the wrong paths. Types like you, Rodrigo, after a few years, abandon the right conclusions and return to the wrong paths.

'I never give myself airs, Rodrigo.'

'I suppose you mean to say by that that you don't need to, is that it? We all know who you are . . . who your father is . . . So you don't need to give yourself airs . . . I'm the one who needs to, because I haven't got a rich father, have I?'

Manuel interrupted him.

'I don't want personal squabbling in here. Every time you open your mouth, Rodrigo, I ask myself whether you are really stupid, or only pretend to be. Sometimes I wonder why you joined our side.'

The three friends remained silent, looking from one to the other. Manuel tried to break the silence.

'What's the time?'

Rodrigo and Pedro looked at their watches and answered simultaneously:

'Ten past four.'

'So who's late, Rodrigo?'

Rodrigo shrugged his shoulders.

'He has got to walk. He hasn't got money for the bus.'

Pedro pulled out a packet of *Paris*.

'Anyone want to smoke?'

Rodrigo took a cigarette from the proffered packet to re-establish some feeling of cordiality, and lit Pedro's cigarette with his lighter.

'And if the fellow doesn't come? I've got my car in front of the door, and if he is much longer, I am going to put it in the alley . . .'

Manuel opened a drawer and took out some magazines which he placed on the table.

'Here, look at these . . . go on . . . There's this week's *Match* here.'

The three of them sat down, and Pedro picked up a magazine at random. He had not yet opened it when they heard the door-bell ring. Manuel went out and returned, a few moments later, accompanied by a tall, dark man with regular, rather angular features, whom he introduced to the other two men:

'João Silveiro.'

They shook hands and returned to their places. The bricklayer sat on the plain wooden chair beside the table.

Manuel spoke.

'I am very pleased to have you here in my house, João Silveiro.'

The bricklayer looked around him before replying. First he observed Rodrigo, but soon took his eyes from him. He spent longer studying Pedro. Then his eyes took in the room and returned to Manuel. He spoke in a clear voice:

'I'm pleased to be here.'

Manuel continued,

'Do you know why you are here?'

'I have been told.'

'Have you any comment to make on what they told you?'

'No.'

'When we need you, where can we contact you?'

The bricklayer glanced round the room again, and hesitated before answering.

'Travessa de Monte, no. 66, first floor, on the right. My wife doesn't know anything about this and I don't want her to know.'

'One of us will make it his job to call on you.'

'Which one?'

'Whoever's able.'

'I want the same person every time. And he can make out he's my foreman.'

He pointed to Rodrigo.

'That one. He looks more like a foreman than anyone else here.'

Rodrigo got up.

'I'm not going! Do you think I've got nothing else better to do?'

The bricklayer looked straight at him.

'It's cost me a half-day to come here. I've got plenty else to do too.'

Pedro intervened.

'I can go. I can say I'm working for a builder.'

The bricklayer studied him again.

'All right then. You'll do. You got a degree?'

'No, not yet.'

The bricklayer pointed to Rodrigo again.

'And that one?'

'He has a garage and servicing station. He's in business.'

The bricklayer turned to Manuel,

'Who's in charge here?'

Manuel smiled.

'No one. We are all in charge. You are as much as the rest of us.'

'There should be just one person in charge.'

'Why?'

'Because there should be, otherwise there's always friction.'

At last! It's like a window being opened. Like the smell of the earth after rain. Poor Rodrigo! You're finished. You had better go and talk about 'serious cinema' and its social function somewhere else. You have lost your place. You've had it. This fellow has never heard of complexes or enlightened spirits. He is pure. He is not puffed up with the thousand and one cups of coffee from the *Brasileira* that destroy respect for reality. For him yes means yes, and no means no.

Pedro and João Silveiro left together. They walked in silence along Rua Ferreira Borges and only when they reached the *Novo Lar*, João Silveiro began to speak.

'We'll get on all right together. You and me.'

Pedro did not answer. The bricklayer continued,

'I'm sick of sham. There were some fellows last year who used to collect me in a car to go to meetings. They showed me off to their pals as if I was a bloody circus animal. They gave me whisky and sandwiches and made me listen to classical music. I was the labourer, the party piece. As soon as I finished one drink, they'd give me another. There were some bits of girls there, students or something, who practically lay down for me . . . What a gag! The girls had their legs showing up to the thigh . . . and the fools of men laughed out loud . . . they thought it all very funny and flopped about with them on the chairs . . . They used to write papers and ask me to sign. "João Silveiro, labourer" . . . Don't take any notice of all this—I just feel like talking. It was like a bawdy-house . . . just like a bawdy house, it was . . . They offered me cigarettes, and whenever anyone came in, they introduced me: "João Silveiro, a friend of ours", and then they added: "He's a labourer". New arrivals shook my hand as if I were a pop-singer or some-

thing . . . You'd think they'd never seen a labourer before . . . That was a gag, that was! Some time after midnight they took me home. Once it was a bit of a girl who drove me home. She had an open car and all the way she was trying to make up to me. She talked of democracy and pressed her leg next to mine . . . I asked her to stop at the corner in case my wife was at the window. When we stopped, she picked up my hands, and looked at them. "Ah, what hands! What strength! These are really the hands of an honest workman!" She asked me if I wanted to go to her *atelier*, and when I went to get out of the car, damn me if she didn't kiss my hands! What a gag! That lot'd be better off in the red-light district . . .'

At times when we are feeling low, when we are beginning to have doubts, life suddenly brings us up with a jolt. Like this. Just like this. I have everything to learn and nothing to teach. But it is worth it in the end . . . it is worth it . . .

'When you called me to your group, I thought it was probably another bawdy-house . . . more cheap girls and records. I wonder if it is. I don't know yet, but you don't look like a fool . . . I'm sick of sham . . . they won't catch me again . . . The first meeting with whisky and me as the animal on show and I'm off. Tell the other fellows I want to work. If they don't want to work, they can find someone else . . . If João Silveiro wants a whore, he pays . . .'

It is worth it . . . it is worth it. One must not lose heart, must not yield to temptations . . . There is no middle road . . . there is only one and it is worth it . . . it is worth it . . .

António and Alexandra

Sometimes it is a sunny morning. Another time it is a chance phrase exchanged with a stranger. You can never tell. The

slightest thing, the merest trifle, can renew man's faith in life, or confidence in his virility. There he is, going along the road, fed up with living, and as he turns a corner, he sees in the distance a child, barefoot, running and singing. Suddenly, for no reason at all, Spring sweeps into his heart with such force that not even the memory of his grandmother, dead and laid in the coffin, is able to restrain him. If it were not for the neighbours, and his age, and his liver, he would race down the road after the child! There is only one life! And this life is a bare two days! I don't give a damn! I've all eternity to lie still and quiet! Ah child . . . if only I were younger . . .

António left the boarding-house after lunch. Every Sunday he was given the same meal: bean soup and three slices of braised meat with potatoes and carrots. Every Sunday, after the meal, Dona Gertrudes made her way through the tables to talk to him.

'Had a good lunch, Senhor António? That was a nice little piece of meat today, wasn't it? . . . Twenty years now I've been going to the same butcher. He always keeps me the best cuts . . . I hope you enjoyed it.'

And outside it continued to rain. He decided to go to a Spanish film at the *Condes*, but there was still an hour to go before the programme started. He walked slowly in the direction of the Praça do Chile.

Today I feel like doing something different. Like going to have supper again with Amélia for instance. If she caught me there she'd murder me. I'm as sure of that as two and two make four. I wonder if she goes every Sunday to that bar? What does Gonçalo do on a Sunday? I don't know. What would I do today if I had a thousand contos to spend? Hail a taxi and go for a ride round. I'd go as far as Estoril and then back round by Sintra. That's what I'd like to do. I'll go to the *Condes*. The film ought to be good.

In the Praça do Chile he bumped into an old woman who was selling chestnuts at the kerb.

'Look where you're going, you great oaf!'

António stopped and dived his hand in his pocket for some money. There was none there and he had to open his overcoat to reach the pockets of his jacket.

'How many, old dear?'

'Old indeed! And wouldn't you just like me, eh?'

'And what would I do with you if I had you?'

'I'd soon teach you . . .'

The old woman burst out laughing.

'That'd be good, with us at our age . . .'

António found an escudo and gave it her.

'Give us a bag of chestnuts and stop your fooling.'

'Fooling! Just hark at him! What fooling am I doing?'

António laughed.

'You're looking at me and licking your lips, you shameless old hussy . . .'

'You're the shameless one, you cheeky wretch!'

They both laughed and the old woman handed him the bag of chestnuts. António felt their weight.

'Do you mean to say this is all I get for an escudo, you old Jew?'

'You're the Jew round here, you artful devil. You want to maul the chestnuts, and me too for an escudo . . . Go on with you . . . Take a few more if you like, but clear off.'

António moved away laughing and put his bag of chestnuts in his pocket. While he stood waiting for the tram, he pulled out the nuts one by one and ate them furtively so no one should see.

And suppose I went to Amélia's after the film? There's nothing to lose . . . I'll tell her I just wondered how she was . . . that I was just passing by and thought I'd drop in and see her . . . No. I'll go in and have it out with her straight. I'll tell her I know Gonçalo and mention something

of his life so she'll believe me, and then I'll say I'm going to tell him everything. That'll teach her. She slung me out of the house like a dog. I'll show her she can't play around with me . . . and then . . . maybe . . . ? No. There won't be any of that. If she wants to go to bed with me, I'll put a stop to that all right. That I will. I'll teach her she can't play around with a man. She can try to buy me, but she won't get anywhere—and she probably will try, too, to stop me saying anything to Gonçalo, but she won't get anywhere . . . That's not what I want. If I went to bed with her, it'd be . . . it'd be indecent . . . dirty . . . Even if she wanted to, I wouldn't. And I mean it. She can try as hard as she likes. Even if she undressed in front of me, I wouldn't.

If anyone had asked him, when he left the *Condes*, what the film had been about, he would have been lost for a reply. He had spent the afternoon in the stalls, thinking about Alexandra. He could see her by the window in her night-dress. He could feel her breasts in his hands and smell her perfume. Just after the second interval, the pains got worse and he had to go to the foyer for a glass of water to take a pill. He even considered leaving before the end of the film but he decided against it. He feared Alexandra might have gone out, as it was Sunday. When the film ended, he was one of the first to leave, and he hurried to the bus-stop and got into the first bus that came along. Half-way up the Avenue, he thought of something which almost made him change his plans.

Suppose Gonçalo's there with her? What should I do? How do I explain my presence to Gonçalo? I shan't do anything. I'll go in as if it's nothing to do with me, and speak to him naturally. It's up to her to get herself out of that one. No. I'll go in and talk to them as if I was a friend of the family. Gonçalo will be surprised and then I'll tell him everything, right there in front of her. That'll settle it.

The idea of Alexandra, naked, begging him not to say anything to Gonçalo, and to take her, occupied his thoughts until the bus reached the Largo da Estrela.

The best thing to do is to ask the maid if anyone is there. And if the maid says her mistress doesn't want to see me? I'll go in all the same. You don't sling a man out of the house in the middle of the night as if he were a dog.

In the Largo da Estrela he got off and walked down Avenida do Infante Santo automatically, almost without thinking, with his eyes on the ground. In front of Alexandra's apartment, he hesitated again, but eventually rang the bell, and when the maid opened the door, entered resolutely without waiting to be told. As soon as he was inside he began to take off his coat.

'Tell Dona Amélia that there's a gentleman here who wishes to speak to her.'

'But there is no Dona Amélia living here. You must be mistaken . . .'

'Alexandra, excuse me. I forgot.'

The maid moved away without taking her eyes off him and disappeared through a door.

A few seconds later she reappeared again, followed by Alexandra, who did not recognize him immediately.

'Did you want to speak to me?'

'I do. Don't you recognize me?'

It was only then that Alexandra, following behind the maid, came up to him and realized who he was. Her expression changed and she ordered the maid to leave the room, and waited in silence while she left. She did not speak until she heard the kitchen-door shut.

'I thought I told you I didn't want to see you again.'

'I hoped you might have changed your mind.'

Alexandra walked over to the door, prepared to open it.

'I haven't. Please leave.'

'Perhaps you'll change your mind when you hear what I've got to say.'

'You can't say anything that will be of interest to me.'

'That's what you think.'

'That's what I know! If you don't leave immediately, I'll call the police.'

'I came to talk to you about Gonçalo.'

Alexandra did not move.

'I see you've been poking your nose in my affairs. That doesn't alter what I said, though. If you don't leave immediately, I'll call the police.'

'Gonçalo is an old friend of mine . . .'

Alexandra laughed:

'No . . .'

'I'm telling you. If you don't believe it, listen: his wife's called Teresa and they've got two children called Pedro and Clara.'

'Is there anything else you know?'

'Yes. On the 15th of every month, he has dinner with an old school friend.'

'I see you know a lot . . .'

'It's not surprising. I'm the friend he has dinner with.'

Alexandra pushed the latch back to open the door.

'Is that all you have to say?'

'No. I have a lot more.'

She looked at him, and for a second or two said nothing. At last, as if she had made a sudden decision, she brushed past him and went into the lounge.

'We'd better talk in here.'

António followed her in silence. They sat down one in front of the other, she on the sofa and he in an armchair.

'What do you want?'

'To tell you what's going to happen.'

'Then tell me.'

'When I came here, I didn't know who you were, nor that Gonçalo . . . nor that Gonçalo . . .'

'Go on.'

'It was only when I saw his photo, that I realized everything, but it was too late then.'

'I'd already seduced you by then, is that it?'

'It was too late to avoid what happened.'

'So then you went home, thought about what had happened and repented. Is that right?'

'More or less.'

'And you decided to call on me . . .'

'Yes.'

'For two reasons: to see how I received you and to threaten me if I wasn't willing to put up with you.'

'Wait a minute! I didn't say . . .'

'Let me finish. If I had offered you a drink and let you see I'd go to bed with you again, you would have forgotten your friend Gonalo and . . . you'd be back next Sunday. Isn't that it? If I'd received you nastily, then you'd tell me the story of your old friendship with Gonalo and finish up telling me you felt duty-bound to tell him everything. Am I right or not?'

'You take me for a . . .'

'I take you for what you are. Neither more nor less. Right. And now? What's going to happen now?'

'Nothing. I don't know . . .'

'I'll tell you what you must do: you must rush round and tell Gonalo everything that happened. Take a taxi: it's quicker. Then go home and sleep in peace. You have done your duty as a friend and an honest man. Of course it is a little late. You should have thought of this before going to bed with me . . . but if you had, it would have meant you'd have lost a night which didn't cost you a farthing. As it was you managed to combine the pleasant and the practical . . .'

'I didn't say that. I wasn't going to say anything like that . . .'

'Then say what you were going to.'

'I . . . I . . . just came to see you . . . and nothing else . . . I was passing and I though I'd drop in to see you . . . I . . .'
Alexandra got up.

'Get out before I tell you what I think of you. I'm ashamed to tell you. I'd be disgusted. But anyway, I'll tell you this: I've been a whore ever since I was seventeen, and I'll always be one. But beside you I feel decent. I feel clean. Get out and don't touch me. You disgust me. You should take your trousers off. You ought to be ashamed to wear trousers. Trousers have a sort of significance, but in your case they can't hide the filth and shit you reek of!'

António walked up the road with his eyes on the ground. Twice he accidentally bumped into people. In the Largo da Estrela a car had to swerve sharply to avoid him. At the bus-stop he put his hand in his pocket and felt the bag of chestnuts there. He ate a few while he waited for the bus and threw away the rest before he got on.

What a disgrace! What humiliation! Good God, why did I do it? What do I mean, 'God'? What's God got to do with this? God doesn't give a damn for fellows like me. He couldn't care less. But what a disgrace! I'll never be able to speak to her again. And Gonçalo? I won't tell him anything. I won't mention Alexandra. It's the only decent thing I can do now. At least Alexandra will see that I haven't told him anything. Perhaps she'll believe that wasn't my intention . . . perhaps she'll even think I really did go there to see her . . . But that's impossible—she knows as well as I do . . . What a disgrace! What have I done? I must go to the Restauradores. Antunes is waiting for me. Just as well he doesn't know anything about this. What would Antunes say if he knew? I'm ashamed to look at people.

He did not get to his friend's house. He went to the boarding-house and locked himself in his room.

At 8 o'clock Dona Gertrudes sent a maid to knock on his door and ask if he wanted supper.

'I went there, Dona Gertrudes, and knocked till I was tired of knocking. He wouldn't answer. I thought I heard him crying, but it couldn't have been . . .'

Dona Gertrudes, worried, climbed up to the third floor.

'Are you all right, Senhor António? Do you need anything? Would you like me to send your supper up on a tray? It's no trouble . . .'

'I don't want anything,' António answered, 'I just want to be left in peace.'

Dona Gertrudes shrugged her shoulders and went down to supper.

Gonçalo and Teresa

Gonçalo, ready to go out, stopped to hear what his wife had to say.

'I didn't want you to leave without our speaking for a moment. I'm getting more worried every day over Pedro. I really think you ought to speak to him as soon as possible. I'm sick and tired of asking you to.'

'Has anything happened?'

'You know quite well what I mean. If we don't make a stand soon, we are going to have trouble with him. Not to mention what might happen to *him* . . .'

'Are you saying this because you suspect something concrete, or because . . .'

'I'm saying this because I feel there is something going on. Have you seen his friends?'

'No.'

'Then see them.'

'Who are they?'

'Goodness knows! I've no intention of making an

enquiry, as you can well imagine, and I certainly don't know them personally . . .'

'I must talk to him.'

'I hope to God it's not too late.'

'You're probably exaggerating. Boys always go through an idealistic phase. I went through it myself. I can't remember now exactly what it was . . . perhaps I never did know . . . I looked on myself as an anarchist or something like that. But these things always pass.'

'Not always.'

'Nearly always.'

'Pedro is different. He is not romantic and given to idealism. You know quite well how practical and realistic he has always been. I can't believe the people he is mixed up with are just harmless romantics.'

'Poor boy! He's going to be so disappointed in his friends!'

'You know Pedro's never been easily influenced. Friends, in his case, are less important than you imagine.'

'I'll call him to the office today and lay our cards on the table. I have an excuse anyway. I want him to represent me at the firm's annual dinner.'

'Good. When will you see him?'

'In the afternoon, when he's finished at the University. I'll leave him a message. Look: you give it to him. Tell him I asked you to . . .'

'I'd better not give it to him, or he'll think we arranged the talk between us.'

'Yes. Perhaps you're right. I'll 'phone him at lunch-time.'

When I was twenty I was an anarchist. And I was not the only one. Let's see . . . João, Manuel, Joaquim Pedro, that fellow who committed suicide because of business trouble . . . what was his name? I can't remember now. I wonder if they still remember our meetings? We hadn't much money to throw around. Rich fathers didn't buy

their sons cars in those days . . . We used to go and eat in a cheap eating-house and discuss life, the real significance of life. Once it was the sexual problems of youth that we chewed over. I still remember that discussion. We dealt with the problem of sex from the scientific and rational point of view. How nice to be twenty . . . How good to leave a restaurant after a few glasses of wine and some 'enlightened' talk, and feel that we are different from the man in the street, more intelligent, more broad-minded, deeper . . . That only happens at twenty. I wonder what happened to Joaquim Pedro? I haven't seen him for years. We used to discuss literature. Everything was terrible. Everything was written by reactionaries. By reactionaries or cretins . . . Naturally it was not necessary to explain any of this . . . We just shrugged our shoulders, smiled, and that was that: the writer was done for. We had two or three we considered good, and these were wonderful. I can't remember their names now . . . nor can anyone else . . . And suppose I could go back? Nothing would happen. I'd go to a dinner and that would be that. I can't see me passionately discussing the sexual problem of youth any more! And apart from that, I wouldn't feel superior when I left the restaurant . . . Pedro's the age for that sort of thing. Pity he can't enjoy his youth a bit longer, but . . . No, it's finished. He's reached the moment when he must start taking life seriously. I am getting old and I want to get him in the firm, and see a man made of him. Sometimes these things can become dangerous. There are no revolutionaries left out of my group . . . wait a minute! That chap, what's his name? Gomes. Gomes, he was called. He was never capable of doing a thing. He set up a commission and consignment agency which went bankrupt. Now he hangs round cafés and talks of ideals as if he were still twenty years old. He looks at us as if we were traitors, as if we were duty-bound to go on meeting in eating-houses and discussing man's future. I wonder what he would have

been like if his business had not gone broke? There is an age for everything. I don't want my son hanging round cafés when he's fifty and complaining of having failed in his business, and masking his impotence with ideals. The worst of it is, I don't understand this new generation. Pedro is not the same as I used to be. He talks very little for a boy with a twenty-year-old's ideals. He seems like a man already. We were poets in my day, but Pedro has nothing of the poet in him. He talks as if he knew what he wanted. I'll have to intervene. It is my duty to him and to my father who left me the firm and the chance to live as I live. I won't think of my grandchildren. I doubt this will ever reach them, but it will at least get as far as my children. Even if it does not, it will last me till I'm finished. I received, and it is my duty to pass on what I received, cost what it may. The problem is explaining all these things to Pedro . . . Suppose I wrote him a letter? That's a good idea. I shall write him a letter. What will he do? God only knows! Perhaps he will come round to the right path, but he is man enough to choose the other one. I have a certain pride in that boy. I shall write him a frank, serious letter.

Gonçalo and Alexandra

Whores, even the most expensive ones, very rarely acquire the culture suggested by the outward signs. Men are their only preoccupation and as it is necessary, when entertaining men, to talk of art and literature, they listen and pick up painstakingly, over the years, some sort of culture. They know that this or that author is good and that another one is bad. They know that Van Gogh painted sunflowers, and admire him because he cut off an ear to give to a whore. They like Gauguin because they have heard he left his wife and children in order to devote himself to his art. Painting, properly speaking, does not interest them. What fascinates

them is madness . . . The fact is, whores live in the hope of a madman appearing, who is willing to give up everything for them.

When they are alone they get bored. It is not problems which interest them, but people. People are their whole life: what people do, what people say they do, what people do and don't say.

As soon as they are alone, they 'phone their friends. They make up parties and go to whichever night-club happens to be currently popular. Occasionally they find someone willing to take them to a restaurant or night-club where other women go, those who are not whores. This, however, does not happen very often, because the men who feel at home in those surroundings do not want to be seen with whores, and those who don't mind being seen with whores, do not frequent those places.

To accompany them around, to take them out to supper at a restaurant or fado-house, to hear their secrets and to chat with them, the whores have their boy-friends.

Some, very young and quite unknown, still do not worry about being seen with whores. They have nothing to lose. Others, not quite so young and unknown, go out with whores for reasons they prefer to keep to themselves, but they take the girls to the restaurants along the Cais do Sodré, places where they know beforehand they will find only men in the same circumstances . . . There are still others who go out with whores because they have so many complexes and such a profound fear of facing up to their own insignificance, that they search around for anyone who is willing to let them shine, and listening is part of a whore's work.

But isn't this right, after all? Isn't this what whores are for? Isn't it to sleep with men, however old and fat the men are? And to let themselves be fascinated by those who cannot fascinate anyone else?

Alexandra put down the receiver and called her maid.

'Maria! Quick: get me my new suit, I'm going out. And hurry!'

The maid brought the suit and Alexandra put it on without bothering to look in the mirror.

'My handbag—the dark blue one . . .'

The maid gave it her.

'Is everything inside?'

'Everything?'

'Handkerchief and cigarettes and powder . . .?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'And my keys?'

'They're here.'

'Then put them in the bag quick.'

When she was in the lift Alexandra remembered the message she had meant to leave and went back.

'If the gentleman 'phones, tell him I went out but I shall be back at six.'

Alexandra's friend was thirty-eight. He came from a bourgeois family who had never had the money to mix with people of their 'class', but did not let this deprive them of the sense of 'belonging'. He had never graduated and had left the country for two short periods. Incapable of standing on his own feet, he had sought a refuge in the musical and artistic world, a world which he discussed with his friends in terms of 'good taste' and 'bad taste', as everyone does, in fact, who can only converse in these terms. As far as Alexandra's friend was concerned, 'good taste' was a personal attribute which he and his friends enjoyed, an attribute of bourgeois families of his set, while the others, poor things, either because they had too much money or too little, were condemned to live for ever in the world of 'bad taste'. He had two or three pieces of glazed pottery at home which he had bought from an antique shop in Elvas, two second-rate engravings and a modern picture painted by a friend. To have had more than this would have earned

him the name of 'nouveau riche' while less would have been ridiculous. He went out with whores because he was not able to shine with anyone else. And the whores accepted him because they recognized in him the style of dress and table-manners of 'people at the top'. And also because he talked to them of poetry. Whores can never resist anyone who talks to them of poetry.

'It's always such a pleasure to see you, Alexandra.'

'You could see me more often . . .'

'You're never at home.'

'You know that's not true.'

They got into the car.

'Would you like me to open the top?'

'Suppose it rains? For my part, I'd like it open.'

He suddenly remembered that he would be more easily recognized with the top open.

'It's bound to rain. The sky looks threatening.'

'If it rains, we can put it up . . .'

'It's too much trouble and I see you too seldom to want to waste time with car-hoods. We'll have it open next time.'

The car pulled away from the kerb, moved down the Avenue and turned in the direction of Eistoril.

'The usual run?'

'The usual.'

'Let's hope it cheers me up a bit.'

'Why? What's happened?'

'Oh, just life.'

'Tell me. Perhaps I can help.'

'It's nothing to do with me actually. Do you know Clara?'

'Zé Manuel's Clara?'

'No. Another one you don't know. She's my best friend.'

'Don't tell me you're cut up because of a girl-friend?'

'Yes, I am.'

'Out with it then.'

'You won't tell anyone?'

'You know very well I won't.'

'Well, you see, Clara's got a wonderful man who's really good to her and . . . and . . . helps her a bit . . .'

'Go on.'

'She's got everything she wants.'

'In that case I don't see what you're so worried about.'

'You haven't heard the rest. The other day Clara went and had supper at the *Ibéria* and met some chap there . . .'

'Anyone we know?'

'No. Even she said she'd never set eyes on him before. They got talking and she ended up inviting him to have supper with her. He was a poor sort of wretch and . . .'

'Right. You don't have to go on. She went to bed with him as an act of charity.'

'Don't be a fool!'

'That's what you implied. How old is she?'

'Clara?'

'Who else?'

'I don't know. She must be about my age, I suppose. Why?'

'My dear Alexandra: only teenagers go to bed with men because they are sorry for them, and even then they have to be very young teenagers.'

The car stopped at the pedestrian crossing outside Alges Station and moved off again. Alexandra's friend, without taking his eyes off the road, smiled, and tried to guess the end of the story. He had no illusions about Clara. He knew very well who she was.

Alexandra said nothing till they were out of Alges. Only when they had turned the bend, when the car was beginning to go uphill, did she continue.

'Do you think no one ever goes to bed through pity?'

'No one of Clara's age, no.'

'Pity's the only reason very often.'

'You ought to know.'

'Pity for ourselves.'

'This is too complicated for me. Tell me the rest of the story.'

'Clara went and slept with this chap and a few days later he paid her a visit. Do you know who he was?'

'No.'

'A friend of the man she lives with.'

'Did they go to bed together again?'

'No. It's what he wanted but she told him to clear out.'

'What's the problem?'

'The chap's going to tell the other one everything.'

'And what's it go to do with you?'

'Clara 'phoned me and asked me what she ought to do.'

'What did you tell her?'

'Nothing. That I'd think about it.'

'Do you want to stop at the *Momaco* for a drink?'

'I'd love to. I'm terrible thirsty.'

They sat down beside the window. The sea, grey and wild, could scarcely be seen through the mist.

'Just as well we didn't have the hood down.'

'We would have closed it by now. What would you advise Clara?'

Me?'

'Yes. What would you say if you knew her?'

'Not to cultivate so enthusiastically the virtue of charity.'

'No, seriously. What would you tell her?'

'To deny it.'

'Impossible. The chap was there in her house. He could describe it.'

'Is her man-friend fond of her?'

Alexandra lifted her glass to her lips before answering, and pointed up at the roof of the restaurant.

'Have you seen those things hanging on the ceiling? Aren't they ugly? . . . No. The man-friend is not particularly fond of her. At least, I don't think so.'

'What will he do when he knows the truth?'

'Clara doesn't know. That's what worries her.'

'It's better to keep quiet and wait. When he makes a move she can always say she was drunk . . . it's some sort of excuse after all.'

'And suppose Clara tells him about it before the other chap does?'

'I don't know. I don't know him. It depends a lot on the man. If he were a fellow like us, perhaps he would understand. If he's some bumped-up little tradesman, it's not worth discussing it . . . What really counts when all's said and done is one's origin. Look at me and tell me if they forgive my being different.'

Alexandra's friend looked sadly out to sea. After a pause, he went on:

'They have never forgiven me, ever since I was at high-school. We live in a world in which the basic condition for gaining man's respect is a low origin . . . What good would it be, anything I might do?'

Alexandra was not aware what impelled her to put her hand on his arm, but she felt it was the moment to do so. Perhaps ten years later she might have realized that she was paying for her drink . . .

'With the mind and experience you've got, I can't understand why you don't do something. Why don't you write a book? I'm sure it would be good . . .'

The friend smiled sadly again.

'No, no, Alexandra. However good my book was, I'm not one of the clique, one of the gang . . . You don't know what the world is like. If I wrote a book or painted a picture I'd have the courage to take a different path from the usual one, and they'd finish by annihilating me . . . The world belongs to them.'

Alexandra suddenly understood her 'friend'. She pushed his arm aside abruptly and got up.

'Will you take me home?'

'Already? But what about our drive?'

'It's late. I have to be at home by six. We'll leave it for another time.'

The friend continued to talk all the way back to Lisbon. Alexandra paid no attention.

'I should have been born in Greece, Alexandra . . . Greece was the place—where there were real men . . . and sculpture . . . Plato . . . comedies by . . . now everything is . . . in Greece, Alexandra . . . They won't forgive us for being different . . .'

Gonçalo arrived at Alexandra's flat at six o'clock, and sat down on the sofa.

'My dear son, I am writing you this letter because your mother and I' . . . No. That will put him on the defensive immediately. 'My dear son, your life and your future are my greatest concern' . . . Perhaps. I must be clear and concise. No romantic stuff. 'My dear son, I have watched you grow, step by step' . . . No. That's no good either. It sounds like one of Antero's sonnets. It would be best to go straight to the point. And why shouldn't I write to him in earnest? Without beating about the bush? I wonder how much longer Alexandra is going to be? It's past six . . . 'My dear son, I am writing to you so that what I have to say is not lost in talk. If I called you to my office and had you sitting in front of me, you would start objecting to things and I should end up not putting the case as I'd intended . . .'

That's it, more or less. I'll write to him tonight. Alexandra is not coming. I'm going.

He was just about to get up when Alexandra entered. She poked her head round the door and smiled.

'I'll just take my coat off, darling. I'll be one minute. Less . . .'

A few seconds later she came into the room with the tray of drinks.

'Have you been waiting long?'

'Ten minutes.'

'Sorry. I went to the Baixa, and got held up.'

They kissed briefly and sat down. Alexandra poured out a whisky and handed it to Gonçalo.

'Been working hard?'

'Same as usual.'

'Well, I've had an awful day. You can't imagine how many people there were in the Baixa. You can't get into a shop.'

'Did you buy anything?'

'No. I've hunted everywhere for a coat but I can't find anything suitable. Are you having dinner with me?'

'No. I'm having dinner with some Americans who arrived today.'

'I knew it. You've never got any time for me.'

'We had dinner together yesterday.'

'Yesterday's dead and gone.'

'Alexandra: do you mind if we don't have the usual reproaches today? There are some days when I don't mind, but there are others when I haven't any patience at all. If you start complaining again, I'm leaving.'

'And what about me? What am I supposed to do?'

'Do what you like. Go and have dinner out somewhere, go to bed, go to . . . go where you like.'

'Has it ever occurred to you that I might deceive you one day?'

How many times in my life must I hear this? Are all women the same? We men have our work, or lives, our world. For us, love is one of many things, like work, or politics, or the club. Women don't do anything and so love is everything for them. Everything they have. They attribute an exaggerated value to it. They hate our work and everything that takes us away from them. They threaten to withdraw their love . . . to deceive us. They don't realize that our lives would go on without their love, that nothing

would be altered. They think love has the same importance for us as it has for them.

Alexandra, without taking her eyes off Gonçalo, insisted, 'Go on, Gonçalo, tell me. Have you ever considered I might deceive you one day?'

The rules of the game require me to say no, that I have never considered the possibility of her deceiving me. The rules of the game require me to speak now of the confidence I have in her. Alexandra is a whore, so love is not in question. What we are dealing with is the appearance of love. It is a little game within a big one. In these circumstances, the rules of the game are invariable: 'the appearance of love must be treated as if it were real love.'

'What would you do if I deceived you, Gonçalo?'

Women seldom realize that the men who surrender themselves completely to love, who make love and women their whole life, are precisely those who have nothing to give, who have no life of their own. That is why romantic passions do not last long. The great lovers are usually second-rate men, and after a time the women begin to realize they have made a bad deal.

'I've never thought about it.'

'What would you do, Gonçalo, if someone told you I had deceived you?'

What would I do? Nothing. I wouldn't do anything. I'd pretend that they had not told me. Except, of course, if she had deceived me with someone I knew. In that case, my public pride would be in question. I should have to adopt some attitude.

'I don't know. I've never thought about it.'

‘Then think now. Do you really think I’m capable of deceiving you?’

I must have heard this conversation thousands of times. There is no woman who does not want to keep her lover in doubt. Only a slight doubt, of course, just enough for him not to lose interest. Women have centuries of experience behind them. For centuries they have been the object of desire, of conquest. In spite of all their emancipation they remain, unknowingly, the same. And a few more centuries will have to pass before they become man’s partner, before they look upon man as an equal and journey through life at his side. What is curious, however, is that they will insist on taking part in man’s life, without understanding that there is only one type of relationship possible between conquerors and the conquered: that which stems from discipline.

Whenever a woman tells a man that one day she might deceive him, whenever she suggests such a thing, she is destroying the possibility of love. Men get tired of such women as they get tired of dogs which continue to wet indoors after they have grown up.

‘What about it then, Gonçalo? Aren’t you going to reply?’

Grandmothers nostalgically describe to their grandchildren the balls they went to in their youth, and talk of the number of suitors they had. Women married to men with moderate incomes cannot resist, at times, talking of a wealthy suitor they once had and whom they refused to marry through love of their husband. They do not realize that as they do this, they are destroying their husband’s love, and their very life, in fact, seeing that their life comprises only love, and their husband’s life is far more than love . . . And in my case? If I had any love for Alexandra, these eternal conversations would eventually put an end to it.

'What would I do if you deceived me? I don't know. It depends.'

'On what?'

What can I say that will not hurt her? Nothing. When behaviour depends, on whatever it may be, it is because it is merely outward behaviour and nothing more. The best thing to do is to give a vague reply and finish with it. I am sick of this conversation.

'On the circumstances.'

Alexandra stood up with her glass in her hand and went to the window. The city was growing dark and through the misted glass the lights of other buildings could be seen. Alexandra, with her back to Gonçalo, spoke so quickly that he could scarcely hear her.

'I was unfaithful to you a fortnight ago, Gonçalo.'

Is that the truth, I wonder, or one more attempt to discover my reaction?

'Do you remember that Sunday when we quarrelled because you didn't want to take me out? You left me here and went home to have dinner with the family. That night I went to the *Ibéria* and . . . I met a chap there . . .'

She is crying. So it is true then. I know she cries easily enough, but even so, there has to be some grain of truth to start crying so quickly. And here I am philosophising on the characteristics of women . . . It's rather amusing! Why is she telling me this? It is certainly not the first time . . . I wonder why she has decided to let me in on things now?

'I felt so lonely. I was feeling awfully low and the chap was like something to clutch on to in case I should sink

altogether. We started talking . . . and I invited him here to supper.'

And then you went to bed together. All this is very nice but it does not interest me in the least. You surely can't have any illusions regarding me, Alexandra? You know quite well that the only horns you can put on me are bastard ones. How annoying all this is! And now what? What do I do? I'll have to do something. But what a damned stupid idea! She must be mad.

'We got supper. We had had too much to drink, both of us, and after supper we started talking. He was a poor devil . . .'

Poor devil? That's good. I'm the poor one, having to put up with you and play the part of the offended lover . . .

'I don't know what happened, but we went to bed. In the morning, when the drink had worn off, I woke up and turned him out.'

And the chap went. What else would he do? He had had his bellyful. And what about me? What do I do now? Act the insulted lover? Take my departure in a dignified manner? How annoying the whole thing is! There's no doubt about it. I shall have to leave looking sad. I shall leave and give the impression I am deeply hurt. It is the only thing to do.

Gonçalo raised his glass to his lips and drank the rest of the whisky. Very slowly, with a deliberate slowness, he stubbed out his cigarette in the ash-tray and prepared to get up. As he did so, he glanced at his watch.

A quarter to seven. Another damned nuisance. I don't have to meet the Americans until eight o'clock. What the devil am I going to do for another hour and a quarter?

The bitch might have waited at least until half-past seven before telling her story . . .

'Aren't you going to say anything, Gonçalo?'

'What do you want me to say?'

'I don't know . . . anything.'

'There's nothing to say, Alexandra.'

'Then you'd better hear the rest.'

More? What more can there be?

'This man I'm talking about saw your photo that's over there on the table. He recognized you. But he didn't say till afterwards.'

'No?'

'At the time he didn't say anything.'

Well, I never! Did you expect him to say? Only if he were a fool! Ten to seven. Will this last till half-past seven?

'He's a friend of yours.'

'A friend of mine! For heaven's sake, Alexandra! Friends of mine don't go to the *Ibéria*, and if they did, it wouldn't be to pick up whores. And another thing: a friend of mine would have left when he saw my photo. I'm certain of that. When you are my age and are . . . when you are my age, you choose your friends carefully.'

'His name's António.'

'António what?'

'I don't know.'

'Do you normally go to bed with people whose names you don't even know? It doesn't matter to me, but you should be more careful or one of these days you'll find your radio missing . . .'

'He said he used to be at school with you. He's the one you have dinner with on the 15th of every month.'

'António!'

'Yes.'

Gonçalo had got up but he sat down now again and burst out laughing.

'You don't mean to tell me you slept with António! Out of all the things you could have told me this beats the lot! With António! But do you know who António is? What a state you've got to! A few more months and you'll be on the street, Alexandra, hanging around the *Nina*, to see if you can find someone who'll invite you to a meal . . .'

Alexandra went over to the tray and filled her glass. Her hands were trembling.

'You don't have to rub it in. God only knows how ashamed I am. Every time I think that I got into bed with that . . .'

Gonçalo stood up.

'Life is full of surprises, but I admit I never expected this!'

'Nor did I.'

'Be quiet. Let me think. Tell me, Alexandra: what are you ashamed of? Of having deceived me, or of having deceived me with António?'

'Of both things.'

Gonçalo sat down.

Poor Alexandra! You're sunk . . . Whores follow well-worn paths. At first they are content with whatever they catch. Then later they begin to be selective. Later still they enter the zone of the 'top people'. They reach the peak of their career when they set up with someone who is both rich and prominent socially, then after that they start to go downhill. The decline probably begins with a business man who is merely rich. The next step down is a business man who is not even rich, and then . . . what? The *Nina*? *Maxim's*? And after that?

Alexandra came up to Gonalo and grasped the lapels of his jacket.

'Do you know why I did it? Do you know why? Because I was lonely. Because I hadn't anyone else . . . because even Ant3nio seemed better than nothing. Because . . . oh, I don't know why . . . I haven't been able to think of anything else for a fortnight, and yet I still don't know why I did it.'

Never mind. I'm not interested in your reasons. What interests me is that it happened and that it's left Ant3nio laughing at me. On the 15th he will tell me about it. How will he go about telling me? Regretfully? Will he apologise, tell me that he did not know until afterwards who she was? Goodness knows!

If I break with her now, the fellow will think he has hurt me . . . that he has finally managed to score a point. I won't break with her yet. I'll make it up with her. I shall tell her I understand and forgive her. Then in a couple of months I shall finish with her. In the meantime I shall continue to send her money and tell her I haven't time to see her.

'Perhaps I understand better than you do, Alexandra, what made you do it. If I had had dinner with you that night, none of this would have happened. As I didn't, the blame is mine to a large extent. I have left you alone too much.'

And if Ant3nio had not told you that he knew me, you would never have told me . . .

Gonalo stroked her hair.

'I admire your honesty. Anyone else wouldn't have told me. Really, I admire you.'

When Alexandra raised her head and looked at Gonalo, her eyes were wet with tears.

'Do you forgive me?'

'We'll not think anything more about it. Pretend it was all a dream.'

'You're wonderful, Gonçalo.'

'Not wonderful, Alexandra. I'm just old and I've seen a lot.'

Without her noticing, Gonçalo glanced at the time.

Half-past seven. Perfect. Half an hour for the journey and I arrive on time. I couldn't have calculated it better.

'Gonçalo . . . Gonçalo: have dinner with me tonight.'

'No, Alexandra. No. I have to have dinner with these Americans. Anyway, I don't want to lie to you: I need a while to forget what happened, to readjust myself . . .'

In the lift Gonçalo lit a cigarette.

If you weren't a whore, Alexandra, you would not ask to be forgiven. Only whores are forgiven for things like this. Anyway, everything has turned out well. I have killed two birds with one stone: I am free of her and I get one over António at the same time. Poor António!

Gonçalo and Teresa

'I decided not to speak to Pedro, Teresa, and have written him a letter instead. I've brought it along to read to you. I think it's better this way. Like this, I don't waste time arguing and I can tell him just what I want to say.'

'A letter immediately makes things look very formal. You can't go back on anything and . . .'

'Yes, I've thought of all that but on the other hand my idea has certain advantages. Anyway, I'll read it to you.'

'Have you sent it yet?'

'No. And it will be handwritten. I don't want to give it to a typist.'

Gonçalo took the letter from his pocket, settled back on the sofa, and began to read:

‘My dear son,

You will no doubt be surprised to receive this letter from me and will possibly think that we could instead have discussed these matters together. But it was precisely to avoid discussions that I decided not to speak with you personally. I want you to read this letter very carefully and think well before making any decision. Your whole future is in your hands, and can no longer be my responsibility.

You were born into what is generally called the privileged class.

That is why you were able to graduate without having to earn your living, and why you have automatically had everything you could desire, including the so-called “accomplishments” of your class: from childhood you have spoken foreign languages that others only learn later and with difficulty; you have visited the museums which your colleagues know only through books; you feel at ease anywhere and have none of the countless complexes others suffer. You had all this on your doorstep without your having to make the slightest effort or waste a moment of your time. All this comes of your having been born in this particular “class”. What would you have turned out, Pedro, if your father had been the local baker? You would not have spoken any language other than your native one; you would never have travelled, never have felt at ease, and if you had met me in the street, you would have doffed your cap with diffidence and respect. As you can see, you had everything to gain and not a thing to lose. I have not the least desire to disguise facts, so I must point out straightaway that I don’t consider you very different from the baker’s son, or what the baker’s son would have been if he had been my son. I merely repeat that up till now you have only received benefits which you, personally, have done

nothing to deserve. Don't think that I consider those circumstances which led to your being my son, and not the baker's son, to be unjust. Justice, in absolute terms, is a man-made dream and nothing more. Dreams give rise to verses, my dear Pedro, but do nothing towards building businesses or fortunes. Lions feed on gazelles, but no one has as yet cared to speak of the injustice of such a fact, although it is possible that the gazelles, at the moment of being eaten, regret not having been born lions. What cannot be conceived, Pedro, is the possibility of the lion-cubs deploring not having been born gazelles . . . and this, my dear boy, is precisely what you are doing at the moment. Lions, incidentally, would have great difficulty in becoming gazelles while human lions, on the contrary, can only too easily, through carelessness, or inaction, or mere stupidity, suffer this transformation. The whole system which has enabled you to study without a care, to travel, and to belong to the chosen few to whom one doffs one's cap, is an extremely delicate system, and extremely complicated, which can fall apart from one day to another. Even within this system, right within your own class, Pedro, individuals are often replaced by others who show a clearer understanding of reality and a keener sense of battle. How many families do you alone know who were at one time rich and who are now treading the downward path which precedes the end? Dozens. And do you know why? Do you know why these families decline? Because they lose sight of the essential values, because they allow themselves to be carried away by appearances, by the conviction that, come what might, God, or Our Lady of Fatima, or justice, will eventually come to their aid. But the system in which we live, Pedro, has nothing whatsoever to do with God, Our Lady of Fatima, or justice. I am well aware that you have studied these matters out of school, and have no illusions about the origin and evolution of the system which has granted you so many privileges. So I shall not refer again to the subject.

What worries me is your personal case, which is also the case of my family. You have heard the words "noblesse oblige" many times during your life. It is a phrase intended to create a feeling of class and a code of class honour. You must never forget, my son, that your family is not of noble origin, although it has recently been found necessary to unearth certain ancestors who do nothing to disgrace our present position. Look around you and you will see that the only nobles who have been able to resist the years are those who married into the "lions' " money. The others, my boy, live in the provinces, bewailing their lot behind their sumptuous arrases and seeking loans, while they mutter "noblesse oblige" and dream of the return of some Don Sebastian who will redeem their china from the pawnshop and guarantee them credit in the butcher's again. Emblems of class are one thing, Pedro, and the rules necessary for the preservation of our class and position, another. Those who waste too much time with the former, end up forgetting the latter, and the latter is more important, Pedro.

You have seen me moving about society, and must have noticed how the counts and viscounts treat me with respect, almost servility. Do you know why? Because I have money. I am one of the new nobility. The counts and viscounts are my historical ancestors. They know how to eat caviar but unfortunately no longer have the money to buy it. They have one desire only: to marry off their children to people like you and your sister. All the rest, my dear Pedro, is just romantic nonsense, and the essential thing is to see the same does not happen to us as has happened to them, so your children in the future do not have to lick the boots of others to come . . . We shall achieve this only if we know how to keep our sense of reality, if, beneath our tailcoats and our afternoons of golf in Estoril, we never let ourselves forget that our position is continually at stake. We have money and we must keep it. How? By continuing to use the methods we adopted to earn it in the first place.

You will be telling me that times change and that I am out of date and that it is the whole system which is at stake. This I freely admit, but I see no reason why I should, in a fit of generosity, give away all my possessions, and as long as there is life in me, I shall defend all that is mine. More than this I cannot do. Let us hope to God that I shall never have to show you to just what lengths I am prepared to go to defend what is mine . . . And don't imagine that it has ever been unnecessary to adapt ourselves. The upper classes have always known how to play the game their times demanded, yielding a bit when it was unavoidable, in order to take it back again at the first opportunity.

This brings us to the subject of our letter. On the 16th we have the firm's annual dinner to which all the workers and office staff have been invited. It is one of those concessions we make to the times we live in. As was inevitable, I was invited to preside and for reasons which I shall explain to you, I should like you to represent me at this dinner. As I have already told you, I do not consider you particularly different from the baker's son and I am sure that the baker, if he knew you well, would be of the same opinion. The prestige of our class rests, in part, on a practice which we call "keeping our distance". You must have realized that much of what we say instinctively, and what fools attribute to snobbery, is the unconscious outward manifestation of certain rules which are needed to preserve our species . . . Everything, my dear son, has its *raison d'être* . . . Dictators have realized this and have devised the mystique of isolation. Armies are aware of it and forbid their officers to mix with the soldiers . . .

It happens, however, that it is not in our interest, ever, to give our game away. This is why I should like you to preside at our dinner. One day, when you take over the business, you will stop going and your son will go in your place. However, as you have recently adopted certain attitudes which I find disturbing, I decided to write this

letter, and ask you to reply in time to let me know if you wish to go or whether I have to arrange someone else as my substitute.

You are going to think that I am a cynic and am getting old. You will possibly even despise me after reading all this. I know it, and yet have decided to take the risk because I have a heavy responsibility towards you. I am your father and it is my duty to prepare you for life. What you do with the weapons I give you, Pedro, is up to you. But I implore you not to forget what I have said above: I am ready to defend what is mine, whatever happens, ever if I have to forget, in the process, that you are my son.

Your loving father.'

Gonçalo finished reading out the letter and looked at his wife.

'What do you think?'

'I trust you will never send this letter to Pedro, that you will tear it up here and now. I never imagined you could stoop so low. You are growing worse with the years . . .'

Gonçalo laughed.

'In what way, Teresa?'

*Your cynicism, your coldness . . . they're revolting. I feel ashamed to be your wife. I never imagined you would be capable of a thing like this. If Pedro read that letter he'd leave the house immediately, and never show his face in the office again. It's what I should do in his place.'

'Don't get angry, Teresa! I told you I hadn't sent the letter yet . . . If you like, I won't send it at all . . .'

'What's happened to you, Gonçalo? What's happened to the religious principles you were taught as a child?'

'It's all here in this letter, Teresa. Do you think I've lost my faith?'

'Yes.'

'No, I haven't lost it, Teresa. The proof is here in this letter. If you understood the least thing about anything,

you would see that this letter is proof that I have not lost my belief in the utility of faith.'

'Explain yourself.'

'It's too late for you to understand. It's not worth the trouble.'

'I don't understand you any more. You are not the same man that I married.'

'When we married I knew less, but I already had the fundamentals . . .'

'You have become cynical. You don't believe in anything.'

'It's not worth our arguing. Here, take the letter. Read it over again and tomorrow tell me what you think. Let's talk about something else. I don't know if you are aware, but business has been good this year. I thought I would give you a present.'

'At the moment, Gonçalo, I am not sure that I want a present of yours.'

'Oh, don't distress yourself, dear. It's a cheque. You can do what you like with it.'

Gonçalo took a cheque from his pocket and handed it to Teresa.

'A hundred contos, Teresa, for you to spend as you please. Wait a minute . . . If you don't want it, it doesn't matter. Give it to me and I'll put it into a fund for the people in the office. It will do to build a new canteen . . .'

'A new canteen? I thought they had a new canteen last year?'

Rule No. 21 of the games that lead nowhere: 'Women like all the privileges that money can give but they do not wish to know how it was obtained.' In my class, it is considered not in the best of taste to explain that money was acquired through business deals or that it is not elastic, and in order to reach our hands it has been denied to others. Women like to chat easily with God, undisturbed by their consciences.

Antônio

Man dreams a lot. There's no one who does not dream and there are few men who reach the age of sixty and do not look back and compare the life they have led with the dream they once had. They weigh the two, and find that the dream was greater than life, greater than the business passed on to the children, or perhaps the misery and hunger they eventually inherit. If it were possible to make an inventory of what is dreamt every day in a city, the dreams in cafés and buses and in the streets—one would think man did nothing else but dream. He begins with a dream and ends with life. It is never possible to determine the exact moment when the paths of dream and life begin to diverge. However much one thinks and looks back, it is never possible to know precisely when the dream was definitively lost. One thing is certain: one reaches the end with a bitter, ashy taste in the mouth. An ashy taste and a disturbing awareness of the lost dream. Sometimes a last gesture is made to save what remains of the dream or to destroy the uncomfortable sensation that one has reached the end with a bit too much experience and not enough dream.

The man from the village who made his fortune in Brazil builds a school and offers it to the community. The popular writer suddenly comes out with a serious book. The prostitute's son goes one morning to visit his mother. The poor devil who never had enough money to betray himself, wants to die with his head held high. Just the remains of lost dreams.

Antônio left the doctor's and walked up the Avenue. The doctor had destroyed all hope. The illness was too far advanced. Ten years ago, if he had been careful, if he had gone to the doctor, perhaps they might have been able to

save him, but now . . . Now he could not properly claim a right even to the few days he had left. 'Clinically speaking . . . well . . . What can I say? Nothing, my friend, absolutely nothing . . . Are you a Catholic? If you were, I should tell you to prepare yourself. You have little time left. How much? I've already told you all there is to say . . . That will be a hundred escudos. Just a moment: is it your first consultation? Then that will be a hundred and fifty. Goodbye, my friend, all the best . . .'

I am not a Catholic and I don't believe in God. It's a bit late to start believing in God now. If I started turning religious now, and God did exist, I shouldn't have the nerve to show myself. When He saw me, He'd burst out laughing. He wouldn't even open the Pearly Gates. How much time have I left? One week? Two? God only knows. The doctor said I could die from one day to the next. Perhaps I'll die in the office. The first person to find me would be Carvalho, naturally. He'd tap me on the shoulder to wake me up, and call me. When he realized I was dead, he'd go, very straight and solemn, to tell the boss: 'There's a man dead in there, Sr. Fonseca. It's Sr. António. I've just found him and came straight in here to inform you. I didn't say anything to anybody so as not to upset work.' Then he'll be praised for not causing unnecessary disturbance and for his calmness and initiative . . . Afterwards, with his colleagues, he'll put in a few strategic words: 'A man dies like that at his desk and no one takes any notice! I went to tell the boss, and do you know what he did? He turned to me and asked me not to say anything to anybody . . . the old tyrant didn't want the work to get behind. You see what they are . . .'

And me lying there as dead as a doornail, flopped over the typewriter. At last the others will come to see me, Santos and young Ilda, Gomes, Maria de Lurdes, Irene . . . Santos will say how only the other day he was having a coffee with me in the *Smarta*, and young Ilda will

remark, 'Look at him then . . . he seems just as if he was alive . . . poor soul . . .'

In front of the Shell Offices, he stopped to light a cigarette.

And suppose I died in bed? There's nothing wrong with that. My father died in his bed. The worst of it is Dona Gertrudes. She's going to be all upset and won't know what to do. She'll put her black on and tell the maids not to say anything to the guests. It would make people uneasy to think there's a dead man on the third floor. I probably won't even be having dinner with Gonçalo this month. Pity. I'd like to go and have dinner with him, and tell him what the doctor told me. I wonder how many people will come to my funeral? Antunes will come, and Dona Gertrudes, and Carvalho, and Santos to represent the boss . . . perhaps Dona Gertrudes will let the maids come. Only a few people. And what about flowers? A cheap wreath from the boys at work . . . a spray from Gonçalo if he knows in time . . . and that's all. I'll be buried in the rain. They'll get their shoes all muddy and will be annoyed at me for dying in the winter. A man can't even choose the season of the year in which to die.

When he got into the bus, it began to rain.

I'm not afraid of death, but I must prepare myself for what's to come. This is the time when men must start thinking about the sins they have committed. I can't remember having committed any really bad sins. I have not killed. I have not stolen. I honoured my father and my mother while they were alive. I never coveted my neighbour's wife. Alexandra . . . she was my neighbour's woman and I coveted her . . . Still, what matters is I don't believe in these things. God's too busy with others to worry about

me. Why am I suddenly thinking about God so much? These things we inherit from the family are more important than we imagine. I shall be sorry to die. I shall be sorry not to see these trees any more, and not to see the dolphins in the Tagus any more. They were pretty, those dolphins, swimming against the current . . . I won't last till the summer. I shall die in winter, on a cold, wet, sad day in winter. No one will miss me. What a bloody rotten life! If only it had been worth it, at least . . . if I'd had at least a full life . . . Still, it's better like this. It's less painful this way.

As soon as he entered the dining-room, Dona Gertrudes announced that the fish-cakes were delicious, 'they'll melt in your mouth, Senhor António, they'll melt in your mouth' . . . Then, lowering her voice, she whispered confidentially that 'she had a new girl in the kitchen, fresh from the country and not spoilt yet, who cooks like in the old days. Just watching her frying those fish-cakes made your mouth water . . .'

When he got to his room, António sat down at his desk and lit a cigarette. Very carefully, so that his words could not be misinterpreted he wrote a long letter to Dona Gertrudes thanking her for the kindness and respect with which he had been treated for so many years, and leaving her all the possessions he might have at the time of his death. He put the envelope away carefully in a drawer and for a long while sat quite still, with his eyes on the wall in front of him. Then, almost without thinking, he wrote a long letter to Alexandra.

'I did not intend to trouble you again, but for reasons outside my control, I am forced to once more. I should like, before going any further, to thank you for the night I spent in your house. Believe me, that night was an experience for me not easily forgotten. If you, Dona Alexandra, had lived

as I have lived, in a cheap boarding-house, without any friends, perhaps you would understand how the memory of that supper we had together is the only pleasant memory life has given me. I know you'll laugh when you read this, but I don't care: I am so used to being laughed at that once more does not make any difference. I must now ask you to forgive my second visit. It was for this that I picked up my pen and decided to write to you. I cannot offer any excuse for my behaviour. Do believe, however, that if I could go back, I should not repeat what I did, and do believe too, that I did not tell Gonalo anything. You can be quite sure of that.'

He put the letter in an envelope, and only then did he realize that he did not know Alexandra's surname. He decided to put the Christian name and then the address, and when he had stuck down the envelope, put it in the drawer beside the other one. He got up and began to move slowly about the room, stopping in front of every object, smiling at the picture of the brig, stroking the old chestnut chest of drawers. In front of the window, he remembered the conversation he had with Alexandra in front of the window of her house, in Avenida do Infante Santo.

'At night-time the city looks strange. Have you ever thought what they do when they get home, those chaps you see in the street wearing Benfica badges in their lapels? Those badges made of little jewels?'

'I'm one of them.'

'Are you? And what do you do at night, at home?'

Today I would be able to answer. At night, at home, we repeat what we have done during the day: nothing. At night, at home, we continue to wait for death, and then when it approaches, we realize that we should have done something more.

He sat down on the bed to take off his shoes and felt a sharp pain. He lay down with the light out.

Is it to be today?

Teresa and Pedro

A man will sell himself for very little. A Volkswagen perhaps, or a flat in a better district, the friendship of a man of influence, or the sort of wife who needs a Church blessing to wed—all are reasons enough for him to betray his integrity. Sometimes the affair is subtler, less obvious, and the man sells himself to see his name in the paper, or to travel at other people's expense, or even simply to gain access to certain circles which impress him. But the process is never a rapid one. Man sells himself bit by bit, in instalments, slowly day by day. After a time many do not even realize they are selling themselves: they reach a position which obliges them to defend interests contrary to those they have always held and so they are bought by this position. Theoretically they continue to defend the same principles as formerly, but in secret they are fighting against the ideals they ostensibly uphold and do all they can to avoid their realization. The vast majority of men, however, sell themselves through cowardice. Married men fear to see their children suffering hunger and their wives without protection. Men who are employed fear the thought of tramping the streets in search of work. Men who have chosen a safe career fear they will not be promoted, and those who have reached a position of responsibility and security fear the thought of changes. Those who enjoy a certain prestige fear a new world which would question the basis of their prestige. Those whose living depends on the values they defend, fear all other values. Fear plays a most

important rôle in the life of man. If it were not for fear of other men, man could live fearless.

Teresa and Pedro sat opposite each other. The eyes of both were drawn to the constantly changing colours in the fire, and Teresa lit a cigarette to gain time.

I don't know how to begin. Why should it be so difficult to talk to a son?

'When you were little, Pedro, you used to spend hour after hour at my feet here. I was always worrying about your playing by the fire . . . One day, when you have children of your own, you will realize how much parents suffer when they see their children playing with fire.'

Pedro smiled and loosened his tie.

'It seems you have something to say to me, Mother, and don't know how to begin.'

'The worst of it is, Pedro, I don't even know what I want to say.'

'Perhaps I can help you?'

No. Whatever happens, I don't want you taking command of the conversation.

'For the moment, my boy, it is still I who am in a position to help you, and you can be sure that no one will help you more willingly and with more love.'

'I'm quite sure of that, Mother.'

'Then listen to what I say and don't argue with me.'

'I have never yet refused to listen to you.'

'But at times you don't pay a great deal of attention to what I say.'

Pedro made no reply. Teresa stubbed out her cigarette in an ashtray and threw the end into the fire.

'Your father and I are very worried about you. No, wait a minute! Don't butt in. I asked you to listen to me with-

out interrupting. We have noticed that your friends are . . . are . . .

‘Common.’

‘That was not the word I was going to use, but it will do. You must admit that your friends are hardly the sort we could introduce to our set.’

‘No, not all of them, that’s true.’

‘Would you like to see your sister married to one of them?’

Pedro laughed.

‘That doesn’t seem a very fair question. I have not the least desire to start a marriage bureau . . .’

‘Answer me: would you like to see your sister married to one of your friends?’

‘And suppose I reversed the question? Would you like to see her married to one of the types she goes around with now?’

‘Don’t change the subject.’

Pedro laughed again.

‘It looks as if we are at an impasse. You won’t answer my question, Mother, and I won’t answer yours. We had better leave questions that cannot be answered and get on to another subject.’

‘I am disappointed that you don’t want to talk to me.’

‘It’s not that, Mother.’

‘Whatever it is, Pedro, you should not be doing certain things at your age . . .’

‘And at what age should one do these “certain things” then?’

‘You know quite well what I mean. Don’t you think you would be better to devote your energy to . . . to . . .’

‘To what, Mother?’

‘Seeing you are so keen on reforms, you could begin with yourself and leave the world to other people.’

‘“The revolution begins from within”?’

‘I don’t know what you mean by that, but you can be sure no one is going to show much gratitude for it.’

'And is gratitude so important?'

'That is not what I mean.'

Pedro took a piece of wood from the box and threw it on the fire.

'Are you satisfied with the world you live in, Mother?'

'There is still plenty of room for improvement, Pedro, but if you compare it with what it was like some years ago, you would realize that a lot has been done.'

I did not bring him here for this. If I get into philosophical discussions, I'll ruin the conversation altogether. What has happened to my son? Have I failed as a mother? Is there no chance at all of our understanding each other now? When he was little he used to run to me whenever anything frightened him . . . Now he has left me, avoids talking to me . . .

Pedro repeated bitterly Teresa's words:

'A lot has been done . . . a lot has been done . . .'

'If you had been born earlier and seen what I have seen . . .'

'I can see enough as it is today. Still, I don't want to start arguing with you, Mother.'

Teresa lit another cigarette. Pedro sat staring into the fire and began to speak quietly:

'I wonder how many fellows spent their boyhood as I did? Sometimes I remember things that happened when I was at school and it makes me want to laugh. Father used to tease me and call me a Communist . . . "Haven't you made your bed, Pedro? You know your comrades might not like the idea of your having someone to do it for you". And there was sure to be some taunt if I came to table late: "You're lucky Comrade Commissar is not here . . . You'd get a bad behaviour mark if he were". I only had to open my mouth for him to start his jokes. One day I remarked that I liked El Greco's paintings. He was on to me imme-

diately: "El Greco! Oh, my boy, this is really serious, you know . . . You mind what you are saying. Haven't you read the latest Party line? If you have not read it, you had better be quiet. It seems that El Greco is not looked upon very highly at the moment . . . he forgot to paint Stalin's portrait into the Burial of Count Orgaz . . . Anyway, you're only supposed to like painters that go to the *Brasileira*, son . . ."

Teresa interrupted him.

'And are your friends today all that different?'

My friends today? What friends? Have I any? Poor Francisco . . . What would he think of El Greco? That he was a fascist. Manuel wouldn't though . . . Friends . . . let's see. Rui, who tries so hard to be progressive, would not dare to risk giving an opinion without consulting someone first. Rodrigo would let me talk on in the hope of catching me saying something that later on in the café he could use to call me a reactionary . . . He'd give anything to be able to do that . . .

'You haven't answered me, Pedro.'

What can I answer? That we are all victims of the same thing? That even those who should be different reflect the times they are living in? I could of course answer in the language of my camp, behind the barricade, but I don't want to do that. That is a special dialect for beginners. When children enter a dark room, they sing out loud to drive away their fear. In the camp we drop into our dialect whenever we have no other arguments or when we are losing confidence in our interpretation of the universe. The set words and phrases of our dialect are familiar sounds to stop us losing our sense of balance in the world or to restore the balance in moments of doubt . . . It is not right to resort to expedients in order to speak with my mother. Perhaps it is the fire. It is difficult to be before a flame and lie. And

one must be honest in all this. Not as much as ought to be possible, but as much as is, in fact, possible. Seeing that I cannot shout the truth from camp to camp, at least I should declare it within my own. It is a pity it has to be like this. To shout from one side of the barricade to the other is much easier, and later on it is even regarded as heroic. But to shout the truth within one's own camp is the most dangerous act of courage. The most dangerous and the most futile.

'Aren't you going to answer me then, Pedro?'

That's settled then: one is allowed to lie from one camp to another.

'Yes, I'll answer you, Mother: my friends are better. Is that what you wanted to hear?'

It was not so bad as I thought. It is all a matter of habit. One thing at least I can do: stay near enough to the truth to keep my conscience quiet. Will it though? Are approximations ever good enough to still the conscience?

'And they would be better still if circumstances were different. I don't think one could say the same of your friends . . . who are, moreover, the ones responsible for the faults of mine.'

This, at least, is true.

'Your father asked me to give you a letter. I'd like you to read it through without any comments. And then think well about the decision you must make.'

Teresa picked up her handbag from the floor by the sofa, opened it and took out a letter which she handed to her son. While Pedro lay back in his armchair and read his father's

letter, Teresa sat with her head on her hands looking into the fire.

Is it my fault, any of this? I have always done all a mother should for her children. I brought them up in the Church . . . I never refused to listen to them . . . I was most careful which children they played with, and I sent them to the best schools. What are they complaining about? They, no. I'm not being fair. Clara is perfectly normal. It's Pedro who is . . . is . . . Normal? Is there anyone normal these days? But what more do they want? They have everything. They have never wanted for a thing. Not a thing . . . What they want is a different world altogether . . .

Suddenly, inexplicably, Teresa felt frightened. She saw herself in the dock in a sombre and dirty court-room, accused by Pedro's friends of crimes she had never committed. She imagined herself in a cart on her way to prison, booed by an anonymous and repellent crowd. She moved nearer the fire and stretched her hands to the flames.

I'm frightened. I don't know why, but I am frightened. But . . . frightened of what? What a stupid idea . . . If it weren't for Pedro I'd never think about such things, and anyway it won't be Pedro who will change the world. It is the Gonçalves who rule the world, not the Pedros . . .

She got up and walked round the sofa to the window. The rain had stopped and the sun appeared through a break in the clouds, a steel-cold indifferent sun. For a few moments the wet roofs reflected the grey light of the end of day. Then suddenly the clouds massed together and it began to rain again. Down there in the dark and dirty street below, two dogs ran by and a couple of bent figures appeared round the corner to disappear immediately into the door of a bar.

Teresa came and sat down again. It seemed to her that she had caught a glimpse of the future. The dark and dirty street, the grey light and the figures in the distance seemed a preview of the world for which Pedro and his friends would fight. Without understanding why, she felt fear steal over her again.

Alexandra

It was four days now since she had heard from Gonçalves. Alexandra knew what that meant. As she sat there in the sitting-room, in a comfortable chair in front of the television, she wondered whether it was worth 'phoning him. The financial problem did not worry her, at least till the end of the month. She had no doubt that she would receive the usual cheque. Perhaps, if she were careful, she might even manage to receive another two or three. Apart from the rent for the flat, she had to pay the instalments on the refrigerator and the television. The dressmaker could wait. Dressmakers of the top girls gamble on their clients as people gamble on the Stock Market. As long as they dress well and keep a good figure, their dressmakers take their risks without pressing them too much. Only when they see them looking down-at-heel, when they know that they have been a good while without a patron, do they really come down hard on them. And they are always up-to-date with what is going on. They are kept informed by the porter, by the other top girls, and the maids.

The worst of it is I've grown used to Gonçalves. I've stopped going to the usual places. I don't know what to do to find someone else now . . .

When a girl finds herself a patron—arranges a 'situation'—she stops going to the places she formerly frequented. Only now and again does she appear and then merely to

humiliate her friends, to subtly throw in their faces her new 'situation'. She turns up unexpectedly, telling them she was 'just passing by', 'can only stay a second', and is then as charming as can be to her friends, attentively asking after their life, their children and their health, in a tone of voice that leaves no doubt of the distance that separates them now.

It is one of the characteristics of the minor professions and countries. When lawyers and doctors start acquiring clients, or as soon as they buy their Dauphine or Volkswagen, they too behave in this manner to their colleagues whom they have left behind.

The worst of it is when the situation changes. They are obliged to return to the old places and their colleagues receive them with an effusive display of friendship which scarcely veils their jubilation.

And suppose I finished with all this? Suppose I found a job? I wouldn't need anyone else anymore. I'd never have to rely on anyone again . . . I could go around with whom I wanted . . .

For a few moments Alexandra let herself drift into the dream. At heart she knew that it was nothing more than just a pleasant diversion, impossible to put into practice. No modest little post she would be fit for would enable her to lead the sort of life to which she had become accustomed. The rent of the flat, her clothes, whisky . . . At times she thought of leaving this sort of life altogether. She imagined herself behind the counter of some small shop. She saw herself, as if it were some other person, making her way home in the rain at the end of the day, feeling herself heroic, defending her virtue against all and sundry. Then one day, perhaps a young man would appear like that other dark, lean boy . . .

Dreams. Dreams and nothing more. Men who marry well-worn types like me are men already soiled by life.

Everything is indifferent to them. They can no longer distinguish between a slut and a respectable woman. They cannot distinguish day from night. They cannot distinguish between God and the devil. For them, everything is foul. For them, the world is just a huge amusement park. They even appreciate whores. They consider them intelligent because they manage to live at someone else's expense, and to live at someone else's expense is the only criterion they know, their only objective. Of course there are still the others, the youngsters still innocent of life, as innocent as newborn babes. Any woman with a grain of common-sense could capture one of those. And then? Then comes the coffees at night in the local café, while the boys study for their Polytechnic or God knows what, the fried fish cooked in last week's fat, the newspaper borrowed from the man next door, and the nights. The endless clammy nights, lost in memories of the past, while the chap at her side snores and dreams of . . . of whatever it is that students do dream of. God knows what students dream about! Then later, when they begin to notice other women, or when the local café and their friends' gossip are no longer enough to satisfy them, then they remember they married a whore. And that's that. The end of everything. Everything? What's everything?

Alexandra sometimes thought of her young brother Gabriel, who was studying and wanted to go into the air force. She sent him money every month. It was a sort of instalment, like the ones she paid on the refrigerator and the television. She sent him money to keep him quiet, to keep him from visiting her, and above all, so that he should not appear unexpectedly and ask her for 100 escudos.

He lived with his parents in Rua Actor Isidoro, and spent his evenings studying in the local cafés, smoking *Sporting* and scribbling into thick books of cheap paper. They had been out together twice. The first time Gabriel had spent

the afternoon criticizing the buildings they passed to show how broadminded and progressive he was. 'These fools here don't know a thing. You should see Corbusier's buildings. He's a Frenchman. He's the man. God, they're a brainless lot here. I've got some magazines at home . . . If you could see them . . .' 'With modern techniques . . . you've no idea what could be done . . .' They had finished up in a 'terrific café' that Gabriel knew, while he smoked *Sporting* one after the other and she, sick of her brother's modern ideas and longing for the moment when she could get away from modern techniques and the café and that quarter of the town altogether, sat drinking *Constantinos* diluted with mineral water so that her brother should not think her rich. The second time they had gone to the cinema to avoid conversation. Even so they had not been successful. During the interval they had met some of Gabriel's friends, also students, with spotty faces, and books under their arms and the profound conviction that mankind was made up entirely of fools who knew nothing of 'modern techniques'. Since then Alexandra had associated all students with Gabriel and had often wondered whether Gonçalo's son had a spotty face too, and the conviction that his father was a fool.

She suddenly imagined herself married to a friend of her brother. The sitting-room changed. There, at the far end, in place of the painting, were two coloured calendars. Against the side wall was a book-case full of cheap translations and on the table were magazines and exercise books. She seemed to see her brother, sitting on the divan, reading the *Seara Nova*. The image was so vivid that she sat up with a start. Her brother pushed his magazine to one side and began to speak:

'Now, Amélia, perhaps you can understand what I used to tell you . . . Now you know what it is to really live . . . Aren't you ashamed of the life you used to lead? Mixed up with reactionaries? Don't you feel yourself more alive, more of a woman? It's a terrific life you lead now, I tell you!

I bet you feel a different person, don't you? What time's your husband due home? I've a few things to tell him, just the sort he likes to hear too, but I can't wait about any longer. I promised to meet the crowd in the café. Are you two going to drop into the bar for a bit tonight?

Drop into the bar for a bit . . . Drop into the bar for a bit . . .

She seemed to hear her imaginary husband enquire: 'Would you like a coffee? A nice strong hot cup of coffee? Or not too strong? I arranged to meet Valdemar here. Don't you know Valdemar, Amélia? What on earth were you doing before you met me? You don't know anyone. Valdemar's a great guy! He's doing economics. And he really floored the professor in an exam, the other day. They had to give him 18 out of 20. 18 or 19, I forget which. He's even been offered a lectureship at a foreign university. In Germany or England. One or the other. You wouldn't think him anything special when you look at him, but when he starts talking . . . Would you like another coffee? I'm amazed you've never heard of Valdemar . . . In any other country he'd have been a professor by now, but you know what this place is . . .'

Alexandra moved over to the coffee table, picked up the whisky bottle and helped herself generously.

No, no, no! Anything but that. Anything but the crowd, the café on the corner, the 'great guys who floor professors' . . . Anything but that! Rather the brothal . . . And a hundred guys an hour rather than one 'great guy' for just one hour . . .

She suddenly made up her mind: forget Gonçalo. Forget him once and for all. She drained her glass at one draught and picked up the telephone. She held the receiver in her hand for a moment or two, trying to remember a number, and when she was through and while she waited for an

answer, drank another whisky. She spoke for a long while, smiling automatically, replying to the friend she had selected, with short precise phrases which were well-trying and guaranteed to have the desired effect. The conversation over, she filled her glass again, stood up and drank to the future.

'Le roi est mort! Vive le roi!' Isn't that what they say?

She dressed carefully and left the room. In the lift, in front of the mirror, she lifted her handkerchief to her eyes and touched up her make-up.

But what the devil am I crying for? I didn't even love him . . .

She stepped out of the lift and forgot to close the door.

Gonçalo and Teresa

The player sits at the table by himself and deals the cards—so many for himself, so many for the imaginary being with whom he is to play. First he picks up his own. He studies them, selects one and begins the game. Now it is the turn of the imaginary partner. The player lays down his own cards and picks up the others. To make the game playable, it is necessary to play the partner's hand as if you had not seen your own, and then follow with your own as if the partner's cards were unknown to you. First trick, second, third . . .

Each time it becomes more difficult to distinguish between the move determined by the cards on the table, and the move which is based on knowledge of the other's hand. The player wants to win without cheating. It is natural to him to recoil from the easiest path. It is natural to him to respect the other player. It is natural to him to respect and destroy him, as soon as the opportunity occurs. He knows his

partner will give him like for like. It is a type of homage that the player can pay and wishes to receive. Fourth trick, fifth, sixth . . . When he plays by himself, the player takes the part of the opponent, and does not spare himself. On the contrary, in order to retain the respect which he has for himself, he is even more intelligent and prudent when playing with the other's cards. The result is doubtful. Both the player himself and the imaginary partner are playing with skill and prudence. When he is playing the other's hand, the player does not take a single risk which he would not take with his own cards. One of them is going to lose. The player knows that the result might be decisive. Seventh trick, eighth, ninth . . . It is the last trick. As he is playing by himself, the player can avoid defeat by interrupting the game. He can and on the other hand he cannot. If he did so, he would not be a player. He cannot admit such an idea. Once the cards have been dealt, the game must go on till one of them is the loser. Either he or the other. The player feels the approach of the last move. He cannot go back. Neither would he want to. He respects himself and he respects his opponent. When a man measures his strength, he measures it to the end. And when a man is capable of measuring himself to the end, he grants his neighbour the right to do the same. The last move is the moment of truth. Who will win? Perhaps the opponent. The player admits the idea without rancour. He admits it with a certain tenderness, the tenderness which unites men who have taken part in the same war. The player concentrates. He plays his card.

'Well, did you give Pedro the letter, Teresa?'

'Yes.'

'And how did he take it?'

'I don't know. He read it . . .'

Gonçalo stubbed out his cigarette impatiently.

'What did he say?'

'He didn't say anything. He didn't make the slightest comment.'

'He kept quiet?'

'He changed the subject.'

'But didn't he say anything? Not anything at all? You don't expect me to believe that . . .'

'He put the letter in his pocket and said he would think about it.'

'But you know the boy well.'

Teresa got up and placed an ash-tray beside Gonçalo.

'Don't drop the ash on the floor. There's an ash-tray here.'

'Stop worrying about ash-trays and tell me . . .'

'I've already told you: he did not make the slightest comment. He put the letter in his pocket and said he would think about it.'

'And the rest of the conversation? Didn't you understand anything?'

'No. You know what he is . . . when he wants to avoid a subject, no one will get a word out of him.'

'But what did you say to him?'

'I thought it was better to accept things as they were. Wait a minute . . . I remember now . . . before he left he said your letter was a model . . .'

'A model?'

'Yes. He said that you had managed to avoid most carefully the chief point.'

'You might have told me that before.'

'As I did not understand what he was getting at, I didn't pay much attention.'

Gonçalo sat down and opened the evening paper. Teresa, without taking her eyes off the magazine on her lap, continued.

'I think it is too late.'

Gonçalo closed the paper.

'Too late for what?'

'To change Pedro.'

'You're wrong. It is not.'

Teresa looked at her husband.

'Do you think you'll achieve anything with that letter?'

'No. I must confess I don't. I even feel I'd have done better not to write it. It was foolish of me.'

'What are you going to do now, then?'

Gonçalo got up and lit a cigarette before replying. With long, even steps, he began to pace the room.

'I am going to set him face to face with reality. When I was Pedro's age I also had my head full of theories and books . . . Everyone has.'

'Don't tell me you were a revolutionary . . .'

'Of course I was. It is part of the state of growing up, and . . . and . . . what do you expect? I was at University then, and a University is a sort of little aquarium where the fishes think life is going to reward them according to the marks they get in class. You haven't the faintest idea what a University is . . . We all thought, though without being conscious of the fact, that all we needed was a degree in order to have the respect of one's neighbour and a steady salary. It's only afterwards the troubles boil up! The chaps who used to get good marks can never forgive life the complete indifference she shows for their little academic triumphs . . . Life couldn't care less for the chaps who stuff their horns with text-books . . .'

'"Stuff their horns" . . . Can't you speak about this without adopting the language of . . .'

'I'm sorry. Anyway, that's how it is. When you leave University, you can't imagine what happens. If you want a job, if you want to earn a living, and . . .'

'And what?'

'Do you remember my father?'

'Of course I remember him . . .'

'When I graduated I went to see him and asked him if he had a place for me in the firm. I can see him now . . . sitting behind his desk, already bowed . . . He raised his head and

asked me if I could do anything. I told him that I had a degree in Law, and he burst out laughing and explained that he had not asked me what I had, but what I could do. Finally he told me that the least important member of his staff was more useful than I was . . . Of course, it did not make much difference. Two years later he died, but my colleagues who had no firms in the family . . . discovered that it is not enough to know half a dozen theories in order to earn one's living. Anyway, when I left University I was full of ideas. The working-class was an abstract entity, in my mind, while the middle-classes . . . Goodness knows what the middle-classes were. Do you remember Arnaldo?

'Which Arnaldo?'

'The one who used to be at college with me and works in the office.'

'I remember. What's happened to him?'

'He continues to live at my expense, or rather at the expense of a university blackmail which all rich men put up with. He graduated with a good mark. Much better than I managed. But he never got anywhere. He tried as a lawyer, but what could life care about chaps who know millions of theories? What matters is to have clients. Poor old Arnaldo succeeded in getting what everyone gets: two or three fellows without any money and friends of the family who do not worry too much about losing a case . . . A year later, he decided to become a magistrate. He became a "delegate" and was content for a while with the bowings and scrapings of court officials and with the attention of the neighbours. In the provinces they still attach a great deal of importance to "His Honour, the Delegate". One day he came to Lisbon and we met. He decided to tell me all his misfortunes, which one could have predicted anyway, as far back as the University . . . He insinuated that my success was due to the fact that the existing social order is unjust, because I graduated with a lower mark than his I deserved a lower social position than his . . . The idea was put forward with

subtlety and the conclusion of the story was that I was obliged to compensate him for the way life had treated us . . . I understood his train of thought perfectly, but I gave him a job, nevertheless. And his hatred of me doubled from that moment.'

'What is he like at his work?'

'Hopeless. He's no good at anything. I have given him several opportunities but he's a dead loss. I don't know how much he earns. Still, there he sits doing nothing. What I can be sure of is that he's always hated me a bit more every time he's failed.'

'Are you going to tell Pedro all this?'

'No.'

Gonçalo stubbed out his cigarette, lit another, and continued.

'No. It wouldn't be worth it. In his present state he would find it impossible to believe that I had not invented the story. It takes a good many years to understand that men act from motives which can very easily be determined. Do you know what I am going to do?'

'No.'

'I am going to adopt different tactics. There is nothing which shocks anyone, especially if he has had Pedro's education, more than reality. They leave University with no more than theories of life. The lower classes are worshipped because they are the victims of persecution. Pedro has never seen, at close hand, a fellow who does not know how to eat properly at table, and who uses long words when he is speaking with rich persons, because he thinks that is the way they talk among themselves. A fellow who gives us a wink when he sees a pretty woman—and who never opens his mouth without showing the envy and spite which gnaws within him. A fellow who is not capable of one single noble thought . . . I am going to show him a chap like that. You know António?'

'Which António?'

'That old school-friend—I'm beginning to see now I have been really persecuted by old school-friends—the one I have dinner with every month . . .'

'Oh, I know the one.'

'I am going to ask Pedro to have dinner with us, and am going to do everything in my power to identify António with the people he is defending. Then, during dinner, I shall destroy him as far as Pedro's concerned.'

'How?'

'By making him look ridiculous. By ordering complicated dishes that the chap won't know how to eat. Leading him on to make idiotic remarks. It's hardly a difficult task for me. It only means adding fuel to the fire. The important thing is to get him to show himself, so that Pedro can see how completely insignificant he is . . . I want the boy to see what the chaps he is going around with are really like . . . Perhaps he'll be ashamed.'

'Gonçalo . . .'

'What?'

'Do you think it will work?'

Gonçalo sat down and crossed his legs.

'I don't know. It depends on Pedro.'

'Do you think it's right?'

'Do I think . . .? Are you mad, Teresa?'

'I asked you whether you think it's right, what you are going to do. You have not answered.'

Gonçalo burst out laughing.

'You ask me childish questions, as if I were a kid at school, and you want me to answer?'

'Yes.'

'Teresa: the class one belongs to is very important. However much you might try to avoid it, it leaves signs which time can never erase. It is our class which is responsible for our tastes, our way of dressing, the books we read, the opinions we hold, the attitudes we take . . . I am going to play with all this behind me . . .'

'And if we all belonged to the same class?'

'Explain yourself.'

'Suppose there were no classes?'

Gonçalo looked at Teresa.

'I am beginning to think you had better have dinner with us too.'

Teresa smiled.

'Sometimes I start thinking, and . . .'

'Then don't. It's bad for you.'

'You treat me as if I were stupid.'

'Stupid, no, Teresa. You are not stupid.'

'Then . . .'

'But it is rather late now to begin thinking. And anyway, you are either for me, or against me . . .'

'For you, Gonçalo.'

And for yourself, Teresa, for yourself too. For yourself and for all of us. Do you imagine the world is going to alter just because Pedro is a fool? Tomorrow might belong to God, but today is ours. Very much so. And it's going to be as long as I am alive. That's one thing you can be sure of, Teresa. And to keep it ours, I am ready for anything.

Gonçalo, António and Pedro

Gonçalo left the house well before his dinner appointment. He had dressed with care. He had chosen a discreet tie and a dark, exceptionally well-tailored suit which he used only on rare occasions. He had decided after a great deal of thought to use the small car and leave the Bentley for his wife. The Bentley would impress António, but this time the game was a more complicated one and António had only a secondary rôle. It was Pedro who mattered. The small car would give him the idea that his father was making an effort not to humiliate his less fortunate friend.

I must make António into a symbol that I can then destroy. I dare not resort to throwing my fortune in his face. Rather the contrary. What I want to show Pedro is that I am superior because I am naturally so and not merely because I am rich. More explicitly: I have to show Pedro that my wealth stems from my superiority and not my superiority from my wealth. The boy's smart. I'll have to be careful. I must not let him think that this dinner is anything special for me. Everything must be quite natural.

At seven o'clock he left his car in the Largo do Picadeiro and went on foot to the Club. He had arranged to meet his son there at 7.30, so he would have half an hour to talk with him. He needed this half hour to prepare the right atmosphere. There was only one small problem to be resolved. Small, but important nevertheless. For years he had selected the *Leão d'Ouro* for his monthly dinners with António, as it was a popular restaurant, where his friend would be at ease. It was neither cheap nor expensive. Not good or bad. Neutral territory. This time, however, he had thought of suggesting an expensive restaurant, where his friend would feel ill at ease and where he could order complicated dishes. Such a stratagem would favour his plan but what about Pedro? If he were to take Pedro to the *Leão d'Ouro* with its enormous cold room, decorated in railway-station style, would that not be a point in his favour to start with?

It's no novelty for the boy to see me in the *Tavares*. On the contrary, as far as he is concerned it is far more natural to see me in the *Tavares* than in the *Leão d'Ouro*. Perhaps for just this reason, it would be better not to alter anything. If we went to the *Tavares*, Pedro would understand immediately that the battle was not a fair one and that I was fighting on my own ground. It might even cause him to begin instinctively to sympathize with António. It's a human enough reaction; no one can remain indifferent to a

stranded pup. I must leave no chance for any of this natural sympathy. If we went to the *Leão d'Ouro* the boy would see that I am always the same, wherever I am, and that I don't need any special atmosphere in order to dominate. All this is most ridiculous and puerile, but it is true nevertheless. One must look after all the details. Settled then: we dine in the *Leão d'Ouro*.

When he arrived at the Club he found a comfortable armchair and ordered a whisky. He drank it slowly, savouring it with pleasure. The idea of the approaching battle pleased him. In half an hour his son would arrive and he could begin the attack. A subtle, intelligent attack, to obtain a positive and difficult result.

'You here, Gonçalves? This is an honour for us! We never see you these days . . .'

'That's true. I arranged to meet my son here.'

'Do you mind if I sit down?'

'Don't be a fool. Since when have you needed my permission to sit down?'

His friend settled himself in a low armchair beside Gonçalves, and went on:

'What the devil do you do these days that we never set eyes on you?'

'The same as I have always done: work during the day and rest at night.'

'Don't you do anything else at night? Only rest?'

Here we go. The inevitable conversation of middle-aged he-men. Smiles and insinuations intended to show that the sex life is not finished. The virility of those who begin to have no other sort left.

'Go on, Gonçalves, admit it now: what do you do at night?'

Gonçalves suddenly felt annoyed. The systematic repetition of the same sort of conversation whenever he entered the Club was beginning to irritate him.

'I read the Bible.'

His friend burst out laughing.

'That's a good one! Wonderful! But that's not what they say, you know . . .'

Second phase of the ritual: every middle-aged friend declares the other has the reputation of a Casanova. Third phase of the ritual: the friends order more whiskies. Fourth phase of the ritual: the friends begin to feel themselves Casanovas. A pity the women don't notice! I can't put up with this fellow tonight. I'll give him five minutes. Pedro's due to arrive and I don't want them to meet. Half an hour's conversation with this idiot would be enough to confirm all he thinks.

'So you read the Bible, eh? That's not what they say, Gonçalo . . .'

'Do you mind if I ask you a favour?'

'Of course not.'

'Even if it's difficult to understand?'

'Go ahead.'

'I've arranged to meet my boy here and I should like to speak with him in private.'

'So you want me to go, is that it?'

'If you don't mind.'

His friend got up unsmiling and left the room.

That's another one who will be talking about me. Ten years ago it might have mattered to me. Now I am indifferent, quite indifferent. If he wants to run me down, let him. Of one thing he can be certain, he won't be paid by me in the same coin. It's too much trouble and I'm getting too old for Lisbon life. I can't be bothered running anyone down any more.

The far door opened and Pedro entered. He crossed the room and shook his father's hand.

'Sit down, my boy. Would you like something to drink?'
'If you like. What are you drinking?'

Good. He must be flattered with my invitation to dinner. It's the first time we have been out together, and he does not seem suspicious as I thought he might.

Gonçalo called the waiter and ordered two whiskies.

'You must have been surprised at my invitation, Pedro...'

'I wasn't expecting it.'

I hope you had not planned to do anything today. Had you?'

'No, but even if I had . . .'

'Good Lord, boy! If you've got anything to do . . .'

'No, father, I hadn't any plans for today at all. I had intended staying at home.'

'Good. Do you know why I asked you to come?'

'No.'

The waiter put the drinks on the table and withdrew. Gonçalo raised his glass to his lips before going on.

'You must have heard me speak of António?'

'Which António?'

'An old school-friend of mine whom I have dinner with once a month. We have been having dinner together now . . . let me see . . . since we left school. That's a good many years now.'

'I've heard something about it.'

'We're great friends. Old and great friends . . . you can't imagine how sorry I am that I cannot take him home.'

'Why don't you?'

'Why don't I? Because I can't. António . . . well . . . you see, if he went there . . . you know what your mother is and you know what she says about some of your friends . . . I can't imagine what she'd say about António!'

Well done! I let him think that I don't disagree with his

friends, and that I even have some like them myself, and at the same time I create a sense of comradeship, between the two of us, a male plot against Teresa's snobbery . . .

Gonçalo finished his whisky and ordered another.

'Women, my boy, have a special criterion regarding one's friends. All that matters to them is that they are the "right sort of people" and that they speak the same language . . . you know how it is.'

Pedro smiled, and Gonçalo, noticing it, continued:

'And they judge people in their own way, according to the size of the knot in their tie, the colour of their socks, and God knows what else . . . António, poor devil, is a man who says "pardon" and addresses women as "madam" . . . You can see what would happen . . .'

The boy is swallowing this wholesale. You are beginning to disappoint me, Pedro. I thought that you would react with more spirit and see through such little tricks . . .

'Besides, one has to think of António himself. You must realize he'd get no pleasure at all visiting our home. The only time he walked on a carpet must have been in the cinema . . . You're not laughing, are you? There must be any number of people for whom cinema foyers represent the height of luxury and good taste.'

I had never thought of this. It is probably right too. One of the reasons Portuguese spend all their time in cafés and go to the cinema whenever they get the chance is because their homes are so hideous. The majority of Lisboans are ashamed to take their friends home. They pay the necessary price to go to the cinema. The film helps them forget the monotony of their life and the foyer makes them forget the rooms to which they must return at the end of the performance.

'Do you see now why I cannot take António home?'

Pedro smiled.

'I see.'

'This does not stop him from being one of my best friends. We'd give our lives for each other . . .'

That's the way, Gonçalves, that's the way. Subtly, very very subtly, insinuate that it is possible to lead two separate lives . . . That we are not demanding anything from him which would imply disloyalty towards himself or his friends . . . That I myself continue to meet old friends and do not consider them inferiors because they have not been the winners . . . Create a feeling of comradeship with the boy, an intimacy stemming from a secret we have in common . .

'It's time to go, lad. I hate arriving late.'

In the car, Gonçalves continued.

'António knows I have two children. I fear he feels hurt that he has never met you. You can imagine, if he had children, not only would I know them but I daresay I'd have been their godfather . . . That's why I decided to ask you to come. You can't see your sister dining in the *Leão d'Ouro*, can you?'

Pedro laughed.

'She'd probably find it highly amusing.'

'But there is nothing amusing about this, Pedro.'

'It's the sort of situation that Clara would enjoy.'

'Naturally! You can see what would happen . . .'

Pedro lit a cigarette.

'I think a good bit of the blame is yours, Father.'

'The blame for what?'

'I was referring to Clara.'

Now we come to a master stroke. I am going to agree with him. I am going to give him to understand that I have

thought of this before. Poor Pedro! You're such an innocent!

Gonçalo lifted his hand to his face, with a gesture intended to show his son that this was not the first time he had considered the subject, and said, in a low voice as if he were talking to himself:

'Perhaps you are right, my boy!'

Pedro, seeing his father's expression, attempted to help him.

'Perhaps you can still do something . . .'

In the same low voice, Gonçalo replied,

'It's too late.'

António was waiting at the door of the restaurant. The three of them entered, chose the usual side table, and sat down. Only then did Gonçalo introduce his son.

'Do you know who this great lad is, António?'

'No.'

'He's my son, Pedro. I have spoken a lot about him to you and I thought you would like to meet him. So here he is.'

António looked at his friend's son before replying.

'He takes after you.'

'Think so?'

'Yes, he's like you.'

They all sat silent looking at each other for a few seconds. António broke the silence by standing up and offering his hand to Pedro.

'I'm very pleased to meet you. I used to be at school with your father, and . . . we have kept friends . . . the sons of my friends, are my friends too . . .'

They shook hands across the table and António sat down again. Gonçalo was holding the menu and discussing it with the waiter. He turned to António.

'Today, my friend, we must celebrate my son's company, and I want a special dinner. Even if it breaks all our tradi-

tions and you are going to be mortally offended, I insist I pay today. Do you mind?’

‘But we’d arranged . . . we have always paid . . .’

‘Yes, I know. I know. We arranged that we should always split the bill, but today’s a special day.’

António smiled.

‘Right. Today you can pay and next month’ll be my turn. But you’ve got a good dinner to pay for, you know . . .’

‘Do you fancy anything special?’

‘No. You choose.’

‘Right. Let’s start with an aperitif. What would you like?’

‘Oh . . . a vermouth perhaps . . .’

‘I’ll have a whisky. What about you, Pedro?’

‘I’ll have a whisky too.’

António decided,

‘Well, if everyone’s drinking whisky, I won’t be the odd man out . . .’

‘Good. In that case, three whiskies. Just a minute. Like *Logan’s*, António?’

‘But . . . haven’t we just decided to have whisky?’

‘*Logan’s* is a brand. Would you prefer another?’

‘No.’

When the waiter had gone, Gonçalo began to study the menu. António lit a cigarette without taking his eyes off the lighter. To have taken a brand of whisky for another drink humiliated him. Had Gonçalo done that on purpose? No. He must guard against this hatred he felt for Gonçalo, who after all had brought his son along to show to just what extent he valued him as a friend, and perhaps even to indicate that the discussion over last month’s dinner had not affected the friendship which bound them. He ought to feel himself flattered by the boy’s presence.

Gonçalo put down the menu.

‘I feel like some asparagus. Do you like asparagus?’

António did not reply at once. He was about to open his mouth and admit that he had never tasted it when he

remembered he had already displayed his ignorance by confusing a brand of whisky with another drink. Two confessions of ignorance in one night would be too much.

‘Yes, I like it.’

‘Good. And what shall we have to start with? Partridges? Duck?’

‘Whatever you like.’

‘Then I suggest that before the asparagus we have braised partridges.’

António agreed, though privately considered that the choice was not the happiest. For three days now the pains had been getting worse and he could move only with difficulty. He had never been away sick in over twenty years at work, and he had decided after all to have dinner as usual. To have missed a dinner, after so many years, would have seemed a sign of weakness. He would never miss a dinner on the 15th, as long as he lived, even if they had to take him there by ambulance. He would never miss one and he would never let his friend know that he was approaching the end of his life. The sod of a life. He had not counted, however, with such pains, such terrible pains which did not leave him a moment’s peace. When he arrived at the restaurant he began his second daily tube of aspirins. He felt out of breath and his heart seemed to be faltering.

The waiter returned with the whisky and Castelo mineral water. While Gonçalo was ordering, Pedro and António tried to make conversation.

‘I have heard about you for a good many years now without ever meeting you . . .’

‘Your father and I are old friends.’

‘You used to be at school together.’

‘Yes. We used to be in the same class.’

‘What about the others?’

‘What others?’

‘Your other schoolmates?’

'Oh, some are still around. Some have died. A lot of them live in the provinces.'

'Are you and my father the only ones who meet regularly?'

'Yes. Just the two of us.'

'Did you go to University?'

'Me? No. No, I didn't go to University. I got a job as soon as I left school. I did think of studying in the evenings, but . . . Then my father died early and I never managed to make any headway. If he had lived a few more years, perhaps I would have taken a degree in Law, like your father . . .'

'Why Law?'

'Why? Well, I don't know, to tell the truth. When I think of degrees, I always think of Law. It's a course with a lot of prospects, plenty of opportunities, and you don't have to study maths . . . It's all talk . . .'

'Are you sorry you didn't go to University?'

'Me? No. Well, I mean, yes, I am. Oh, I don't know . . . I see people with degrees around who can't get a job . . . But on the other hand you can always get a better place with a degree. A little place with a pension, in the Civil Service somewhere . . . And you don't have to work so hard . . . not half so hard . . . Sometimes . . .'

António hastily broke off when he saw that Gonçalves had finished ordering and was following the conversation attentively. Without knowing why, he felt that Pedro had been invited there for a special reason. The attention that Gonçalves was paying to what he was saying, without offering any comments, suggested that he was letting him go on speaking for some purpose. Why? What was his motive? And Pedro? Did he know what his father was up to? No. He could swear the boy was sincere. The interruption had surprised him, and he remained with his eyes on António, waiting for him to continue. But it did not do to let oneself be carried away by appearances. These upper-class types are capable of anything. Like father, like son . . . No! Careful

now not to exaggerate. But . . . had he said something daft? He'd said he had not gone to University because his father had died early, and if it had not been for that, he would have chosen Law as there were most opportunities with a degree in Law. Had he said anything else? Yes. That chaps with degrees get jobs with a pension in the Civil Service, where they don't do much work. He should not have said that. He ought to have remembered that those who are rich do not realize what a pension means to some people. For them, a pension is something that caretakers and policemen look forward to, an aspiration which classifies an individual. He had given Pedro the impression that he was nothing more than a failure, a mediocre fellow who measured life in terms of a guaranteed pension and little work. He had better go back and correct the impression he had created. He could see from Gonçalo's face that he was laughing within. Why? Wasn't it normal to want to introduce one's friends with pride? Friends! As if Gonçalo could be his friend! At any rate, he had to go back and try to undo the bad impression he had created.

'Not that I should have got a job in the Civil Service. Certainly not . . . I have never been afraid of work. If I had got my degree, I should have become a lawyer . . .'

Gonçalo picked up the glass into which the waiter had just poured half a bottle of Castelo water, and began to drink slowly, without taking his eyes off his son.

Has the boy sufficient experience to realize António's reasons for changing the course of the conversation? Is he capable yet of understanding men by what they say? Can he understand just what the expressions 'get a job in the Civil Service' and 'become a lawyer' reveal? Can Pedro understand that these very expressions contradict the declaration of courage and independence that poor António is trying to make? I fear he is still much too green to understand the

real significance of the expressions men use . . . Learning to listen is more difficult than learning to read. Rule No. 44 of the games which lead nowhere: 'The stupid and the unwary lay themselves bare when they open their mouths. They lay themselves bare even when they think they are covering themselves with the heavy cloak of words. Through their words and expressions, men say far more than they think they are saying. Sometimes they say exactly what they want to conceal. If you want to know your neighbour, learn to discover the significance of his words, learn to interpret his gestures and his pauses.'

António was silent. He had tried, in vain, to show that he did not lack courage and daring with which to face life. The contradiction, however, between what he was saying and his actual past, prevented him from going on. He knew that Gonçalo, with a single question, with a single smile, could destroy all he had said. His friend's silence was beginning to irritate him.

'Would you like some crayfish before the partridges? Perhaps it might not . . .'

António's answer came before his friend finished the sentence.

'No! I would not! I don't want any crayfish; I don't want anything else. The partridges will be quite enough.'

Pedro, surprised at the promptness of the reply, and the tone in which it was delivered, showed concern:

'Are they bad for you?'

António replied dryly,

'No, they are not bad for me. I just don't fancy them.'

Gonçalo explained to his son,

'António does not like them. I had forgotten. There is nothing to get perturbed about: there are a lot of people who don't like crayfish . . .'

The reference to the crayfish banished António's last

doubts. He realized now that his friend had declared war. The unexpected presence of the boy was not, after all, a gesture of friendship. On the contrary, it was part of a plan Gonçalo intended to put into action during the meal. The very explanation made to Pedro was intended to humiliate him even more: the friend, adopting a paternal, protective attitude, gave the impression that he did not like to see him look small in front of the boy, but that also he was not unaware of the motives which led him to refuse to eat crayfish . . . What was it all in aid of? Anyway, he would accept the war. He even had weapons the enemy knew nothing about. He could drop one or two hints about Alexandra without going back on the decision he had made, to say nothing to his friend. He only had to let Gonçalo see that he knew about his affaire with Alexandra, to make him change his attitude. The insinuation would naturally have to be veiled because of the boy. For the very first time he had the upper hand. Even the fact that his friend belonged to the upper class, and he to the lower, was favourable to him. His friend belonged to the class which judged people by their table manners and behaviour. For these people, anyone who does not know how to behave properly at table, cannot possibly have decent moral standards. When Gonçalo saw that he knew of his affaire with Alexandra, he would be reduced to calling off the war, for fear that António would speak of it in front of his son. It would never occur to him that he—a fellow who could not eat crayfish without getting his fingers soiled—had principles which prevented his mentioning Alexandra in front of Pedro . . . Here was his trump card.

The waiter arrived with the plate of partridges and, obeying a sign from Gonçalo, began to serve António. António thought of the surprise in store for his friend and smiled, anticipating the other's humiliation.

Gonçalo did not miss a single word or gesture of his

friend, and understood immediately what had caused the smile.

You have remembered Alexandra and you think you are going to give me a surprise. You are smiling with pleasure. You think I'm going to run with my tail between my legs, like a tramp caught sleeping in a rich man's garden. Poor António! You belong to a class in which moral values almost always take the form of rigid prejudices, or in which these prejudices are called moral values, which amounts to the same thing. Even if you wanted to, you would be incapable of referring directly to Alexandra in front of Pedro. Naturally you are not aware of any of this. On the contrary: you are going to drop two or three hints to let me know that you have found out about Alexandra and me. You think I am going to be worried sick, and fearful that you will come out with all you know . . . Poor António! I know you like the back of my hand . . . Even the 'learned' Antónios—do you know what a 'learned' António is?—attack the conventional rules of morality in their books and learned opinions, but when they find someone who does not follow these rules in practice, they are off as fast as their legs will carry them! Poor António! You do not realize what ordeals and extrenities do to people. I could even tell you what is going to happen in a few moments from now . . . You will start with some insinuation that I shall pretend not to understand, and then, imagining that I really do not understand, you will drop another, more daring one. Naturally I shall remain uncomprehending, and you, my poor António, are going to lose that nice smug smile! The fact is there is nothing more you can do. You cannot go any further. Your father was an officer of a tiny fleet, and your mother died praying for the conversion of Russia, and your grandparents, my old friend, were married in a whitewashed chapel somewhere near Guimarães . . . You have as many generations of bourgeois behind you, as have

all the learned Antónios who attack so courageously, in their little books, the principles of morality that they follow so blindly and religiously in their third-floor flats in Areeiro . . .

‘The partridges aren’t bad, are they? Aren’t you talking, Pedro? What’s the matter—lost your tongue?’

Pedro smiled. He realized now that he had not been invited here just so that he could be introduced to António. He knew that his father was deliberately cultivating the tense atmosphere which was gradually enveloping them. That suggestion to order crayfish had been a deliberate provocation. There must have been some story, that he knew nothing about, attached to that. He had seen his father many a time effortlessly easing a tense situation with a word or a gesture, and if he did not do so today, it was because he did not want to. What was his plan? And had the plan been conceived on António’s behalf, or was it, on the contrary, a little play put on to demonstrate something to him, Pedro?

António put down his fork and turned to Pedro.

‘I can’t help feeling I’ve seen you somewhere.’

‘That’s quite likely.’

‘Are you often around Rua do Comércio?’

‘No. I only pass there by chance.’

‘What about near Avenida do Infante Santo?’

‘No, I don’t go there either.’

‘I thought I’d seen you round that area. I go over to Avenida do Infante Santo every day, you see, to one of those new buildings constructed on columns. One of the partners of the firm who lives there is laid up at the moment and I take him his mail every afternoon. They’re magnificent, those buildings, don’t you think, Gonçalo?’

Gonçalo shrugged his shoulders.

‘They’re not bad.’

That's the first insinuation. A reference to Avenida do Infante Santo. The chap's making progress. He feels more at ease. He is almost in command of the situation. I must let him grow a little more.

António went on,

'Do you know what they are like inside?'

'Yes. I've a friend who lives in one of them, whom I have dinner with occasionally.'

'I asked because I have seen your car parked there.'

'Have you? That's more than likely. Another partridge?'

'No. Do you go there often?'

'Where?'

'Avenida do Infante Santo?'

'It depends. There are times when I go there often and times when I scarcely set foot there. Why do you ask? Would you like to go in my place?'

'Whyever should I?'

'The houses aren't bad, but the rents are high . . . How much do you earn?'

'Enough for me.'

'But are you interested in one of those houses?'

*'No. I've just said I'm not.'

'Then what are you keeping on about them for?'

Go on, António, reply now, if you can . . . Go on . . . I'm waiting . . . I'd like to know what you've got to say . . .

'It's just that I've seen your car there so often . . .'

'Is that all?'

'What else should there be?'

'Goodness knows! You seem as if you're hinting at something. What do you think I go along to Avenida do Infante Santo so often for? Do you think I'm preparing a revolution or something, or that I have a secret place there where I sell cocaine?'

‘No. It was just curiosity.’

And that’s the end of that, my poor António. Your secret weapon has exploded in your hands. I did not have to resort to very big bullets either. The size of the bullet must always be in proportion to the size or type of the animal to be killed. It is as difficult to kill partridges with bullets as it is to kill elephants with shot . . .

António ate the last fried potato on his plate. They were potato straws, not the ‘French fried’ he liked. His friend’s reaction bewildered him. A counter-attack was the last thing he would have expected. He felt absolutely lost. His plan had misfired and he had the feeling that from now onwards he was going to be in Gonçalo’s hands. But hadn’t that always been the case? For years he had always ended up in Gonçalo’s hands. This time it was going to be even worse. There was a witness, Pedro, who was watching everything without a word. There were two of them laughing at him. Two, to whom life had given everything: money, security, intelligence and . . . and health. Even health. And him? What had fate had in store for him? Nothing. Short and weak, he had not even been wanted for football at school. Whenever he approached the sports field, the others would start shouting: ‘Clear off, Skinnybones . . . go and do some training and see if you can’t grow a bit.’ And he would go and sit on the bench in the shed, in the shade, to avoid the sore throat he used to get every time he was in the sun. He plodded away at his books in order to be on a level with the others, but not even there had he any success. Gonçalo always got better marks—and with only half the work. Life was unjust. Intelligence and money and health ought to be distributed in equal proportions among all men. That would be a different matter! Life would be really beautiful then, marvellous, like a dawn which goes on right through the day . . . Later on he had met a girl who lived near and

whom he might have married. He had got so far as thinking about it, but he had put a stop to that one evening in the cinema. They had gone to the *Condes* with her mother, Dona Júlia. During the interval, in the foyer, the girl had been absent-mindedly watching a tall, smooth type who was leaning against the wall, reading the newspaper. That look of hers had spelt the end of the hardly-begun romance. He could not resign himself to the idea of his being compared with every tall, strong man his wife happened to meet, especially since he would not have stood up to the comparison. For some time now he had automatically loathed every man over five foot eight tall. He had only to see a fellow in the street with a bronzed skin and broad shoulders, to be overcome by a blind hatred which took in sun, sea, beaches and life itself. Sometimes in the office or the café, he would pretend to know all the powerfully-built youngsters who happened to pass by. He told the others how stupid, ignorant, empty-headed they were. On the other hand, he had only to see a little, weedy, consumptive-looking chap, to declare him immediately full of the highest intellectual and personal qualities. Gonçalo had for a long time been the only one spared this hatred he felt for tall men. Their friendship had arisen, indeed, precisely through his being so weak. One morning at school, António had thrown a stone at one of his stronger colleagues, and then run and hid behind a wall. He knew that if he were caught he would get the biggest hiding he had ever had in his life, but he had been unable to resist the temptation. The boy he had aimed at was one of his worst persecutors. Whenever they met it was always: 'Get out of my way, Skinnyguts. Mind you don't get squashed accidentally.' That day the temptation had occurred suddenly. He had picked up the stone and flung it, instinctively, almost without thinking. A few moments later, squatting behind the wall, listening to the voices of his school-fellows who had got together to hunt for him, he had whimpered, and

trembled in fear of what would happen. The boys, eager for a scene, and anxious to show themselves on the side of the stronger, had spread out in a line and were moving towards the wall where António was hiding. He heard them shout; he almost heard them sweat, full of health and strength: 'Come on, coward, show yourself!' 'Throwing stones is all you're fit for!' 'Now you're going to get what for! And you won't get out of it either.' Suddenly one of them had leapt up on top of the wall, and stood there, in his shirt-sleeves, enormous, shouting: 'Here he is! The swine's here!' 'Now he's for it!' They had formed a circle. In the centre stood the two of them, António and the other. Everyone was silent. The other boy made a short speech and pronounced the sentence: 'Stone-throwing's a coward's trick, do you hear? It's only cowards who throw stones. You're a Skinnyguts and you're a coward! But you're going to learn to be only a Skinnyguts.' António had stopped trembling. He knew that he could not run away and if he made the least attempt to defend himself, he would only suffer more. And suffer he did. First a blow in the face, on the right side. Then on the nose, which immediately started bleeding. The third blow caught his eye and the fourth, full in the stomach, knocked him down. When the other boy saw him on the ground, he gave him a kick on the chest which tore open the skin. The onlookers enthusiastically urged on their hero: 'Go on, give it to him!' 'Teach the little rat not to throw stones again!' 'Knock the stuffing out of him!' Finally they had gone away. They left him there, abandoned, stretched out on the ground, sobbing. He had stayed like that for some time. He did not move a limb, but a convulsive sobbing shook his entire body at regular intervals. At lunch-time he had dragged himself to the tap to wash his face. He did not want his mother to suffer, seeing him in that state. He dipped his head in the basin and was trying to wash the blood off his chest when Gonçalo came up. They had never spoken. Gonçalo belonged to the

other camp, to the ones who played football and had money to spend on doughnuts in the café opposite. He wanted to know what had happened, and António, his face and shirt still plastered in blood, and sobbing, had told him the whole story, and showed him the wound on his chest. The next day, at the end of the first lesson and before the boys had left the room, Gonçalo had gone up on to the platform and warned his class-mates that from henceforth, anyone who so much as touched António or called him Skinny, would have him, Gonçalo, to answer to. Years later António had asked him what had led him to such an action, and the answer was curt and incisive: 'I have never liked the courage of mobs, and apart from that I wanted to know who was the stronger, they or I.' Time had worn away the friendship which had apparently united them from that moment. Only the habit remained. Habit and the profound hatred which António cherished towards his friend. Considering everything, what exactly had Gonçalo saved him for? To persecute him for the rest of his life? To keep him constantly humiliated?

António, who had just finished his partridge, saw the waiter approaching with a long serving dish. The asparagus was arriving. If he could, he would have flung it in Gonçalo's face. On top of it all, the pains had started again. He would have to take some more aspirins, two at least. The pain had begun in the stomach but it seemed to be trying to move higher.

'Drink something, António. You haven't drunk any thing.'

'I don't feel very well.'

'What's the matter?'

'Nothing serious.'

'Have you been to the doctor?'

'Yes.'

'And did he put you on a diet?'

'No.'

'Then, drink, man. You should drink while you can. Perhaps you won't have the chance a few years from now.'

'Perhaps you're right.'

Gonçalo filled António's glass, and he drank it straight down. The waiter had meanwhile placed half a dozen sticks of asparagus on his plate, and Gonçalo, seeing his friend had already been served, commented:

'Asparagus is somewhat like crayfish: difficult to eat but worth the trouble. Do you know how to eat them?'

'With your mouth.'

'My dear António, you remind me of the time we were at school together. Then you had an excuse. Now, unfortunately, you haven't.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'That such a reply is more typical of a child than a man.'

'And who's the judge of that? You?'

'We both are. And you know perfectly well I am right. I think we had better change the subject.'

'And suppose I don't want to change the subject?'

'Then don't. No one can stop you arguing.'

António filled his glass again and raised it to his lips.

'Gonçalo: do you remember how we got to know each other?'

'Vaguely. I believe someone had hit you and I stood up for you, but I can't remember the details now. Why are you bringing this up?'

'I remembered it a few minutes back and I've been thinking about it . . .'

'It happened years ago, and it was never particularly important.'

'But it was. It's you who don't realize it. One day I threw a stone at some chap who beat me up good and proper. I was a little fellow. I was never strong. The next day you

told the gang that if anyone hit me again they'd have you to answer to. Do you remember?'

'No. I must confess I can't remember any of that.'

'Do you know why you did it?'

'Goodness knows . . .'

'I'll tell you: you did it because you wanted to know who was the stronger, you, or the rest of the gang. It was you yourself who told me.'

'So what?'

'So what? So everything. Everything and a bit more too. I don't you understand?'

'No.'

'It was only a little while back that I understood. You didn't stand up for me for my sake, because you were sorry for me, or because you thought you shouldn't take advantage of a chap because he's weak. You stood up for me simply to put your strength to the test. You did it for your sake, not mine . . .'

'I admit quite frankly that all this is true. A man's life is always the measure of his strength. A man's worth lies in the extent to which he knows himself, and the extent to which he knows how to measure himself. I don't see any reason for you to be so awe-struck about it. It has always been like that and always will be.'

'And what about the others?'

'What others?'

'Those that haven't any strength?'

'I don't know. I've never had this problem. You're still not drinking enough. If you drank more, perhaps it would drive the pains away . . .'

Pedro intervened.

'Perhaps you shouldn't drink any more. It might be bad for you.'

António refilled his glass.

'Nothing does me any harm. Or everything does, perhaps. You choose.'

Pedro smiled.

'No one can choose for someone else. Everyone has to make his own choice.'

Gonçalo, who had just helped himself to the melted butter, put down his fork.

'Everyone makes his own choice and has to suffer the consequences of that choice.'

António drained his glass again.

'That's a lie. Some people are born without any opportunity to make choices. Some people are born with their life already chosen for them. What did you choose, Gonçalo? To be strong and rich and intelligent?'

'What the devil are we talking about? This is a celebration dinner, not a schoolboys' Saturday meeting to save the world . . . Waiter! Waiter! Bring us a bottle of champagne!'

'And who says that you can't save the world at a celebration dinner? You take my word for it, Gonçalo, the aim of every dinner should be to save the world.'

Gonçalo began to laugh.

'I never expected this, António. I seem to have gone back to my college days . . . All I need now is to grow a beard again! So, my dear António, the aim of every dinner ought to be to save the world? Is this what you have been doing all these years? Have you at last arrived at the conclusion boys reach at college? After so many years . . . I expected something better of you . . . Not much, I admit, but something, at least.'

Gonçalo leant towards his friend and continued,

'Are you in great pain, António?'

'Enough.'

'And would you be happier if you knew I was in pain too? Would you like me to give you half my intelligence so we are on a level? Would you like me to chop a few centimetres off my height to give them to you so that you would be a bit taller and could walk along the street without being frightened of other men you met? Would you like me to

give you some of my strength so that you could let fly at someone when you felt like it? Is that what you want? Is that what you call saving the world?

António did not answer. He sat staring at his fork, listening to what his friend had to say, without offering a word.

'No answer then? What do you need in order to answer me? A bit of my courage? Do you want me to send a waiter out to look for someone willing to give you a bit of courage? Don't you see, man, I'm trying to help you? Don't you realize I'm offering you all that you've never had, or ever will have, to save the world, your paltry little world of inborn impotence? Haven't you even the courage to face the truth? Your truth, exactly as it is? Would you like me to begin again?'

António had to make an effort to hear what his friend was saying. All the hatred accumulated over the years, all the useless blind fury which have given meaning to his life, seemed to take possession of him at that moment. He did not dare look directly at Gonçalo, for fear of losing the control he was keeping with such difficulty. Fortunately he had not used all his weapons. He could still speak of Alexandra and what had happened. He still held one last, powerful weapon.

'Aren't you going to answer? Do you want me to begin again? Would you like me to be writhing in agony just because you . . .'

António got to his feet and stood leaning on the table with his hands clenched white and tight.

'I'll answer. I should like to see you with my pains and I should like to have your intelligence. I should prefer, however, to see you with double my pains and to have double your intelligence, to make you pay for all you've done to me . . .'

'All I've done to you! But what the blazes have I done to you? Saved you from your class-mates? Is that what you're

referring to? Or is it my existence you can't forgive?

'I don't forgive you anything.'

'Forgive me for one thing at least: that I call your attention to the disturbance we're causing. Everyone in the restaurant is looking at us. Sit down.'

'I shan't sit down.'

'Then don't.'

António, standing there, very pale, turned to Pedro.

'Would you do me a favour?'

'Certainly. What is it?'

'I should like to speak to your father alone for a minute. Could you possibly . . .'

'Would you like me to leave?'

'No. That's not necessary. But if . . .'

Gonçalo interrupted,

'Go over and pay the bill, Pedro. I'll tell you what happened later. Have you got enough money?'

'I don't think I'll have enough.'

Gonçalo took a note from his wallet and handed it to his son.

'Go on.'

Pedro moved away and António sat down.

'You think I'm a bit of dirt, don't you? You think that, beside you, I'm not worth a damn! You needn't deny it, it's not worth it. Well, I want you to know that in one thing at least I'm as good as you. Do you know what I'm talking about?'

'No.'

'Then I'll tell you. You've got horns, man. I've slept with Alexandra.'

Gonçalo smiled, got up and called a waiter to bring him his coat.

'I know all about that. You slept with her one Sunday, three weeks ago. You slept there but you didn't stay to breakfast. Didn't you know it was customary? She woke up in the middle of the night and turned you out . . .'

The waiter returned with Gonçalo's overcoat and made as if to help him on with it. Gonçalo sent him away and when he was out of ear-shot, continued,

'But you can't give me horns, António. You haven't the class. Where professional prostitutes are concerned, you must realize it's all a question of pride . . . To make me feel humiliated, you would have to be a chap able to wound my pride. And that's not the case here. Nobody knows you. Nobody knows who you are. If they saw you leave the house they would just think you were her brother. I tell you, honestly, if she has to have someone, I'd rather it was you. What worries me, though, is your not staying to breakfast. Would you like me to make sure it doesn't happen again? Don't stand on ceremony, António. You'll even be doing me a favour . . .'

António made no response. His mouth felt dry, and the pains, which at first had come only at intervals, were now more intense and almost continuous. He had only one desire: to get out of the restaurant, to be rid of Gonçalo and Pedro and the asparagus and the whole lot. He wanted to be alone, quiet somewhere, where he could spend a few hours without having to remember anything.

Pedro, seeing the two friends had stopped speaking, came over.

'So?'

Gonçalo put a hand on his shoulder.

'Let's go. António isn't feeling well. We'll take him home . . .'

António interrupted him.

'No, no. I prefer to walk. I have always liked walking and it does me good.'

'Are you sure?'

'Sure.'

They said goodbye. At the door, when he was leaving, Gonçalo turned back to his friend:

'Don't forget what I told you, António, about that business we were discussing: whenever you wish, she's at your service . . . You only have to say . . .'

António

After Gonçalo had left, António stayed in the *Leão d'Ouro* another hour, sitting at the table, finishing off the remaining wine in the bottles. He felt worse and worse. The effect of the aspirin had worn off. He tried to read the evening paper, but was unable. Eventually he left the restaurant and went home by taxi. He went up the stairs slowly. He stopped to rest several times before reaching the landing. The pains were growing more intense all the time. He felt like sitting on the stairs and stopping there.

It's today for sure. It's impossible to live like this. Goodbye, trees! Goodbye, Alexandra! Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye! All good things have to come to an end, but not all good things have a beginning. The worst of it is when they begin and end all in the same moment. Goodbye, Alexandra! I'm sorry about what I did. It wasn't my fault. It was Gonçalo's fault. No, that's a lie. It wasn't anyone else's fault. It was my fault and mine alone. I'm sneaking out of life in disgrace. So the end of my life will be like the rest. I've lived my whole life in disgrace. I never meant you any harm, Alexandra. I never meant you harm, nor anyone else. Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye! Gonçalo will be here still. I wish my mother were here to help me up the stairs and tell me not to be afraid. Would you be ready to do the same thing, Alexandra? I'm feeling afraid and losing my fear at the same time. It's nearly over, my fear. Fear and everything else . . .

He had difficulty in opening the door. When he lifted

his arm to put the light on, he felt such an acute pain that he had to lean against the wardrobe.

What did I say that about Alexandra for? What did I say that for? It's only right I should die alone here. I betrayed God. No. No, it wasn't God I betrayed. God's got nothing to do with this, not yet anyway. I'm sorry Alexandra. I didn't mean to say anything. You know I didn't mean to say anything. You know I wasn't even any good for what I did do. I'm the scum of the earth. Sodden trash. Have you ever had asparagus, Alexandra? It's very long and very white. There's nothing to be done when it appears. There's nothing to be done with anything. Whatever anyone does, they always have the laugh. Alexandra: my soul's aching. I haven't got a soul, but it's aching all the same. Mine, and yours too. I feel the souls of everyone aching within me. Even the souls of the dolphins that tomorrow will be swimming up the Tagus, full of life. I'm crying, Alexandra, crying because I'm sorry for myself. It's sad, isn't it, when a man feels sorry for himself? Well, I'm sorry for myself. And sorry for the trees. And for the dolphins. And for you, who belong to everyone except yourself. I'm sorry that life has been like this . . .

He sat on the edge of the bed and took his shoes off. He undressed with slow, heavy movements. He put on his striped pyjamas without taking his eyes off the ground. With his pyjamas on, he crossed the room and opened the drawer where he had put the letter he had written to Alexandra.

It was the only letter I ever wrote to you. I'm going to put it in my wallet to send to you one day. I want you to know that I never meant to say anything to Gonalo. I told him, I know, but I didn't mean to. What a fool I am! How can I send it to you if this is my last night? Anyway, I'll

leave it here, so they'll send it to you. Like this I can lie down and know that there'll still be something, just once more, between the two of us: you've still got a letter of mine to come. Let's pretend life is not quite finished, that there is still something to do. I don't care if Gonçalo knows everything. What worries me is that I betrayed you. It was you who told him. You did it to defend yourself against me. You see what life's like? I only wished you well, and there you were defending yourself . . . and you were right, of course. I've never been capable of a single decent action in all my life. I betrayed you, the same as I betrayed the trees and the dolphins. I'm all confused. I miss my mother. I'm as sentimental tonight as a fifteen-year-old girl. Still, it doesn't matter. It's only once in a lifetime. The last chance I've got.

Gonçalo

Before entering his office, Gonçalo stopped for a moment at the top of the stairs. From the floors below he could hear the sound of typewriters and the scraping of chairs. Years before, when his father died, he had stood there in the same place, plucking up courage to face, for the first time, the oldest employees of the firm. It had humiliated him to feel that, for a time at least, any of them could give him lessons on the business in hand. Many of them would even try to reduce him to the level of a symbol, a rich-man's-son more interested in the profits than in administration. Such illusions had not lasted long, however. Two weeks later no one any longer had any doubt as to who the director was.

He still remembered how shocked some of them had been; Gomes, for example, who had generously offered his assistance, and Dr. Reis, who had hinted, with the greatest delicacy, that he had been his father's right-hand man.

He had received them all in the same way, without a smile, without a word of gratitude:

'If I need you, which I doubt will happen, I shall send for you.'

What a long time ago that was . . . Now the only thing which gave him pleasure was to know he was the motor which set the whole thing in motion. Not even money interested him now. Profits increased without a great deal of effort and the business almost ran itself. It only needed a little push here and there, from time to time, a chat with a Minister, and everything went on fine . . .

Tomorrow is the 16th. That's the day of the firm's annual dinner. That devil of a young Pedro's been avoiding me. I don't know if he's going or not . . . If he doesn't want to go, I'll send Dr. Reis, and go and have supper somewhere in Estoril. If it wasn't for this, I'd get away for a while. I feel like getting out of Lisbon. I need a change. Things used to be more fun than they are nowadays. I could stretch out in the sun and feel its warmth all over my body. I could go out in the car and be swept away by the speed, and feel myself alive and full of energy and promise. Now I have to resort to my imagination, I have to remind myself that I am in the sun, or think of the speed, to make myself aware of them. Is it my age, or is it just myself?

He went into his office and sat down at his desk. There in front of him was his mail, duly sifted. He pushed it aside, without paying a great deal of attention. He picked up his diary, where Dona Beatriz recorded with scrupulous care his appointments for the day, and read it: 3 p.m. visit from some American (chemical products); 5 p.m. meeting with the Head of one of the departments; 8 p.m. dinner in the *Leão d'Ouro*.

What an effect habit has on people! Dona Beatriz knows

perfectly well that those monthly dinners are finished now. I told her myself, on the day of António's funeral. It was even she who bought the flowers, but still . . . she has been writing '8 p.m. dinner in *Leão d'Ouro*' for so many years, that she can't get rid of the habit now. She is getting old. As old as I am. And habit grows with the years . . . On the other hand she may have written at the beginning of the year: '8 p.m. dinner in the *Leão d'Ouro*' on the 15th of every month right through the diary. In that case she has either forgotten to cross them out, or else has simply overlooked the matter.

He flicked through the pages looking for another similar reminder, but did not find one.

It must be habit. So what? Were the dinners on the 15th something more than a habit after all?

He rang the bell and a few minutes later, Dona Beatriz entered the room.

'I didn't know you were here, sir . . . I didn't see you come in . . . You were later than usual and I didn't think you would be in. I was inside, putting the files in order.'

'It doesn't matter, Dona Beatriz. I didn't want you for anything. Tell me: how many years have you been working here with me?'

'I've been working fifteen years with you, sir, but I was working down below before you took over. Altogether, I've been with the firm seventeen years.'

'You began work early.'

'I had to, sir. My husband didn't earn very much and I . . . had to help out.'

'How much are you earning now?'

'I had a rise at the end of the year. I earn . . .'

'No, don't tell me. Bring me an inter-departmental note. I want to give you an increase in salary and let you have a holiday.'

'But, sir, I haven't asked for anything . . .'

'Do you have to ask?'

'I'm extremely grateful, I'm sure. My sister will be able to have the extra. Her husband died a little while ago and she wasn't left anything.'

'Talking about people dying, did you realize you made a note in my diary for dinner tonight in the *Leão d'Ouro*?'

'Yes, I know, sir. But don't think it was a mistake. I did wonder when he 'phoned, but . . .'

'Phoned? Who 'phoned?'

'It was early this morning, just after I arrived. A gentleman 'phoned, asking me to remind you about dinner tonight. I asked who it was speaking, but he wouldn't say . . . He just said he didn't want you to forget, sir, that today was the 15th, and you would be having dinner at eight, in the usual restaurant . . .'

'Are you absolutely sure of what you're telling me?'

'I'm quite sure, sir. I made a note of the call, and paid especial attention because I remembered you had told me that your friend had died . . .'

What the devil's this? Some fool's trick? But no one plays around with this sort of thing. Death puts the fear of God into everyone and it is a thing they respect. Has António got some friend who knows about our relationship and wants some money, or favour, from me? But this hardly seems likely. If he wanted money, or if one of his friends wanted to talk to me, he would have come here, to the office. He would not resort to a joke in bad taste, like this, which would only be detrimental to him . . . Was it Teresa, I wonder? Is this one of Teresa's little jokes? No. Teresa never liked those dinners, but she would not do a thing like this . . . Who the devil can it be?

'You didn't recognize the voice, Dona Beatriz?'

'No, sir. It wasn't a voice I knew.'

'Could you repeat the conversation, word by word?'

'Well, no, I couldn't now, but you can be sure it was all just as I've told you, sir . . .'

There is only one person it could be: Alexandra. When we left him, António was furious. He probably went and told her about our talk, and now she wants to have her revenge . . . or make it up between us perhaps. Either is possible . . . It was Alexandra for sure . . . and this little bit of scheming is just the sort of thing she would do.

Gonçalo picked up the 'phone and dialled Accounts.

'Call Senhor Pereira, will you?'

'Who's speaking?'

'Call Senhor Pereira, and stop asking questions.'

'Senhor Pereira is busy. I can't interrupt him if it is something that one of the rest of us could deal with. Who's speaking?'

'Call Senhor Pereira immediately, and learn to recognize my voice. And that's a piece of advice I'm giving you.'

'Oh, it's . . .'

'Yes, it is. Get a move on. Pereira? Very well, thank you. Did you see to that money I told you to send . . . What? But you know what I am referring to, don't you? Yê's. Precisely. No? You forgot to make a note of it? Listen, Pereira: I know you have been in the firm for a good many years, and that you are good at your job. I have never criticized you, but there is one thing I am telling you now: I am the one in command here. I, and no one else. When I give an order, it is to be obeyed. Do you know how much I might have lost through your forgetfulness? No? Then I'll tell you. What would you think of me if I forgot to pay you your salary at the end of the month? No answer? I'll answer for you then: you would think of me exactly what I think of you at this moment. What you have just said is not very complimentary to you, I can tell you. Right. The matter's closed. I want you to get a taxi and go straight to

the address I gave you immediately, and deliver the money . . . What? Exactly. That's what I'm telling you to do. Go immediately and explain . . . Naturally. Explain everything nice and carefully and say that I know nothing about your going, do you hear? Make out that you have only just realized the oversight and decided to go there of your own accord.'

She must have been furious because she had not received any money and then on top of it António went and told her about our conversation . . . She must have been . . . I can just see what she was like . . . Now Pereira goes there and it's one or the other: either she believes him and that's an end to it, or else she decides to go to the *Leão d'Ouro* and see what she can do. This is just the way she'd go on. And what about me? What do I do? If I don't put in an appearance in the *Leão d'Ouro* she won't believe Pereira's story. She'll think it was her 'phone call that made me send the money and I sent it to her to keep her quiet . . . Then she'll 'phone every month to see if it always works. So I'll go to the *Leão d'Ouro*. I'll put a stop to it now. The best way to go about it, of course, is to show her that I could not care less about her. I'll take another girl with me, someone who she does not know. I shall pretend I have found a substitute and have forgotten all about her. Any woman will do as long as she is very pretty and Alexandra does not know her. She'll have to be dressed extremely well. The problem is where can I get hold of someone? Wait a moment . . . suppose I 'phoned Madalena?

He picked up the telephone and dialled a number.

'Is that Madalena? Gonçalo here. How are you? Look, Madalena, I want to ask you a favour, a rather strange one: do you know of a very pretty girl, but really pretty, who would like to have dinner with me tonight? Naturally. That's not the problem, however . . . She must not know

Alexandra, not even by sight. Yes. What I want to do is . . . Yes. It only means dinner. Naturally she'll have to give the impression during dinner that we have known each other for some time. And are you certain Alexandra has never seen her? Absolutely? Good. I'll send my car round for her at 7.30 on the dot. Yes, I know it's early, but that's how it is. I've already told you there will be no larking around. Look: how much do I give her after supper? Isn't that rather a lot? Don't forget she'll be back by ten . . . Right. That's settled then. Goodbye, my dear, and thanks a lot. Whenever I can be of any assistance . . .'

I can just see your face, my dear Alexandra, when you see us walk into the *Leão d'Ouro* . . . Rule No. 26 of the games that lead nowhere: 'Before entering into combat, find out what weapons your enemy has, and for every one he has, make sure you have two . . .' It is only generals who have never been under fire who say that battles are won with talk and bravura.

At five to eight, the car turned into Rua 1° de Dezembro. Gonçalves saw the time and told the chauffeur to drive round the Rossio once more.

It would not do to arrive before Alexandra. I must get the best effect possible out of our entrance. I must be certain, even if it means arriving late, that we do not get there first.

'That's understood then, Candida? We go in arm in arm and laughing. You address me as Gonçalves and I'll call you "darling" now and again. Pretend to be impatient. Say you don't like the restaurant and that you are fed up with being there . . . Get it?'

'I understand everything perfectly . . . The only thing I can't make out is why you won't tell me whom we are going to meet . . .'

I don't want to tell you. I want you to think it is a man. When you see it is a woman, even though you won't be very pleased, you'll play your part better. Your feminine pride is at stake. The surprise will work in my favour.

'I don't know myself. I believe it is a friend of mine, and I want to show him that I have a woman I am fond of. It's too long a story to tell in such a short time. At any rate, you know what you have to do: be as flirtatious as you like and treat me as if there was something, how shall we say? between us . . .'

'I get it.'

They made their entrance at ten past eight, arm-in-arm and laughing. Gonçalo immediately looked towards the table where he had dined every month for over thirty years. He saw a figure with its back to him, reading the paper. At that moment Candida, obeying her instructions, exclaimed:

'But, darling, what are we dining here for? I've never seen such an awful restaurant . . .'

The man who was sitting with his back to them put aside his paper and turned towards them.

'Sit down, father. I've been waiting for you. Is this lady with you?'

They sat down at the table. Gonçalo took his cigarette case from his pocket and lit a cigarette.

This is the answer to my letter. To my letter and to everything. I have lost the battle. I lost the battle because I'm no longer with the times, and because it is not by weapons that the victors win. It is those who belong to the times who win the battles. Last rule in the games that lead nowhere: 'When everything is lost, when there is nothing else to be done, generals must act as if they did not realize they were the ones responsible for the corpses all over the

field. They must smile and pretend the defeat was a trifling matter.'

'Well then, Pedro, aren't you going to offer us a drink?'
Pedro looked at his father.

'How about a whisky? Do you like *Logan's*?'